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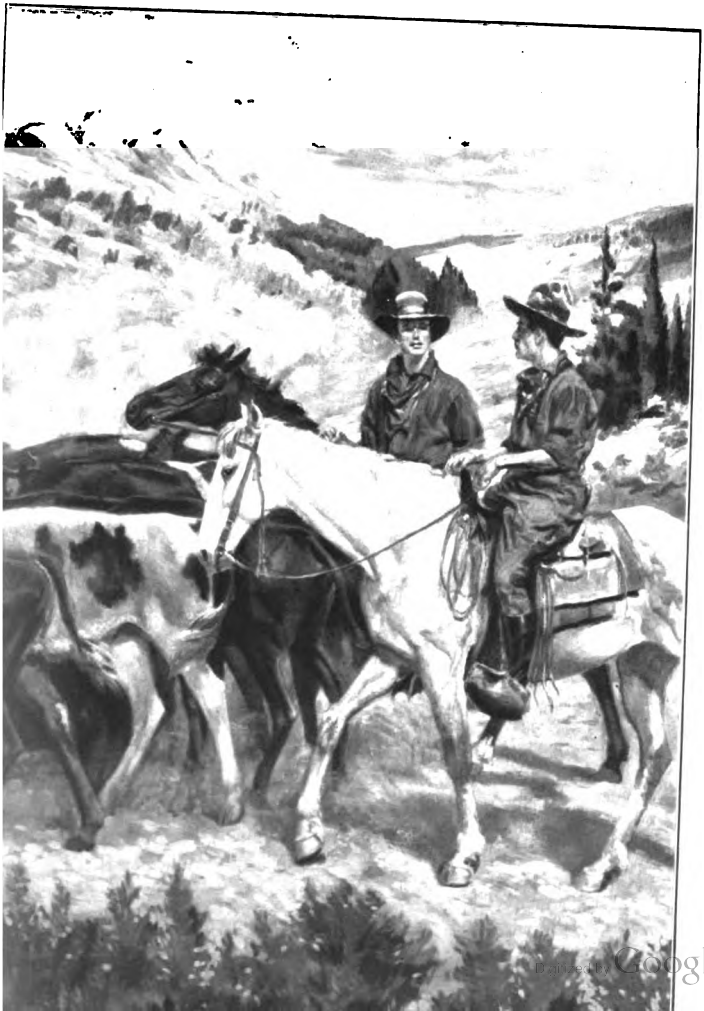

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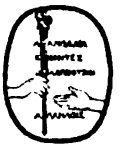
CAMPING ON WESTERN TRAILS

ADVENTURES OF TWO BOYS IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

BY

ELMER RUSSELL GREGOR
AUTHOR OF
"CAMPING IN THE WINTER WOOD"

ILLUSTRATED



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CAMPING ON WESTERN TRAILS

I

HITTING THE TRAIL

IT was just daylight in a little frontier town of southeastern Montana when a pack-train, guided by picturesque riders, started into the sage-brush wastes. At the head rode old Dick Welles, a famous Rocky Mountain prospector and hunter; behind him followed three pack-horses; and after them rode Edward Williams and George Rand, young Easterners who had come west for a vacation of outdoor adventure in the wilds.

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now sending them to the Rockies for their first college vacation. Some explicit correspondence with old Dick had settled it. Here they were in the saddle on the first day of July.

The sun rose above a range of snow-clad peaks as the riders halted and turned for a last look at the town. They were bound for the great mountains whose granite shafts towered against the sky far to the north; and the boys told themselves that many weeks would pass before they would see signs of civilization.

"Good-by, old sore spot," laughed Dick, waving his hat. "Go on, Buck," he cried to the splendid mustang beneath him; "there's nothing but God's country ahead of us now."

The boys felt the same thrill. They had been confined to hard work for nine months. Now they were free. Turning their backs upon the vanishing outpost of civilization, they faced their ponies toward the mountains

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glad to be rid of the town, and they pulled impatiently in their endeavors to pass the slower pack-animals. The latter were led by Vixen, an old white mare. She, of the entire outfit, seemed sorry to leave the comforts of civilization, and several times she stopped and looked longingly back. Perhaps she remembered her hay-filled manger.

"There goes a buck antelope. See if you can catch him," cried Dick, as the nimble creature sprang from a clump of sage.

The boys instantly urged their ponies into a wild race over the rough, boulder-strewn plain faster than either of them had ever dreamed of riding. It was a great race, but the antelope easily maintained its lead. It bounded along in a series of jerky, stiff-legged jumps which kept it safely in front. They could not use their rifles, for the game was protected by law. After a mile of this dangerous riding they abandoned the pursuit and returned to Dick.

"I guess that stirred your blood some, eh?" he laughed.

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Heigh! Yip! Stay with him, pard!" Dick cried, gleefully.

George was having his first experience with a bucker. Skeets, unaccustomed to caresses, started trouble when he felt George's hand upon his neck. Head down, back arched, he began a series of short, stiff-legged bucks which rattled every bone in his rider's body. His first unexpected jump threw George several inches above his saddle. Then he grasped the pommel, determined to hang on.

"Remember the buck!" cried Ed, reminding George of the time he had crossed a Maine lake on the back of a deer. "Hang on, George! Whee! Whoopee!" he yelled, delightedly.

Skeets bucked and pitched with wild abandon, but George stuck to his back. It seemed as if he might actually weather the storm, until the bronco combined the famous buck and side wiggle. At this George found himself in the sage-brush.

Then the real fun began. Jubilant at his

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going miles to see. Bounding past their excited audience, the four-footed outlaws started to buck their way across the continent. This brought some strong language from Dick, for Vixen had loosened her pack, and the air was filled with cooking-utensils and supplies.

Uncoiling his long lariat, the old plainsman started in pursuit of the runaways, and Ed went with him. George sat up in the sage and held his aching sides while tears of laughter rolled down his cheeks.

Dick finally caught Vixen when she became entangled in the pack-rope and fell. He gave her into the care of Ed and then raced off after Skeets. But the bronco had gained a good lead, and it was some time before Dick returned, with Skeets following meekly at the end of his rope.

"They'll be all right now that they have it out of their systems," laughed the old prospector when they were ready to go on.

"How about Vic?" asked Ed.

"He'll have his turn, too," promised Dick.

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There was a little pool at this place, and Dick decided to halt beside it for the noonday rest. The pack-animals were staked where there was grass, and the riding-ponies were freed of saddles and bridles. Then, while the boys held the halters, Dick produced three pairs of hard leather anklets, each pair connected by several heavy links and a swivel. He called them hobbles, and he fastened a pair to the front feet of each horse before he turned it loose. At that time Vic had his "spell," and for several minutes he went through the entire alphabet of bucking.

"I'm glad that comes while I'm off duty," said Ed, with much satisfaction.

"Don't worry, pard, you'll have a chance to feel what it's like later on," laughed Dick.

The knowledge acquired from Ben Adams in the north woods proved valuable, and Welles saw that his young companions were not the "tenderfeet" he had thought them. They helped him with the fire and the cooking and

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on the plain. He showed them to his companions, and Dick exclaimed:

"They're coyotes—prairie-wolves, some call them—and I'll bet dollars to doughnuts they've pulled down an elk calf. Take your rifles and see how near you can crawl. Kill them if you get the chance; they're the meanest, low-down outlaws we have," he said, savagely. "Keep in the sage and work out to that boulder yonder. If you reach it you'll be in range."

The lads seized their rifles and crawled into the sage.

"Did you hear what Dick said? They're real wolves," whispered Ed.

"I know it," replied George.

"Will they show fight, do you think?"

"No. From what I've read about them they're actual cowards. But let's stop talking. One is looking this way now."

Stalking on the blistering plain was slow, hard work, and the boys were hot and tired before they had covered half the distance. But neither was a quitter, and they deter-

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One of the wolves raised its nose and advanced a few steps. There was no wind to betray them, so the lad remained quiet and the suspicious animal resumed its feeding. Then, believing that their approach was unsuspected, the stalkers advanced.

At last they were within a few feet of the boulder, but to reach it they had to cross an open square of exposed ground. They were within range, but it was impossible to shoot, for the boulder hid two of the coyotes, and the third would see them if they ventured from concealment.

But at last they found a chance to reach the rock and peeked cautiously around the sides. In plain sight, feeding ravenously from the carcass of a small spotted animal, were three large wolflike creatures. Their backs were turned and they seemed entirely unconscious of danger. The boys determined to avenge the baby elk. They took careful aim and pressed the triggers. Two of the wolves fell, kicking, but the third fled across the plain.

"Give it to him!" cried Ed, as he rose and fired.

When the wolf was out of range they hurried to the scene of the outlaw feast. Two large coyotes were dead upon the ground, and close beside them was the freshly killed carcass of the elk calf. Well satisfied with their work, the boys brought their trophies to Dick.

"Where did you learn to do that?" he asked in surprise, as the boys proceeded to remove the pelts from their victims.

"From an old Maine trapper," said Ed.

"Stow them away for safe-keeping," said Dick, when they had finished. "There's a bounty on them, and you're richer than when you started."

They bridled and saddled the ponies and again set out on their journey. Although they had traveled a full half-day, the mountains seemed to be as far away as ever. Dick said it was because the atmosphere was so clear. The day was excessively hot and they permitted the horses to make their own pace. Dick hoped to reach a ranger's cabin before dark, and he promised the boys fresh trout for supper.

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"Not enough to make a crowd," replied Dick, humorously. "As a matter of fact, we are following an old buffalo trail."

"And were there so many buffaloes here?" asked Ed, with interest.

"Thousands of them. But they're all gone, and before you are as old as I am it's likely the elk will be gone, too. I suppose I've helped to send them over 'the divide,' but I can balance up my account without shame. The hide-hunters and bone-thieves couldn't hire my old gun for the slaughter. No, sir, I've never killed anything in the animal kingdom except to fill an empty stomach or to destroy what the law says should be destroyed," declared the grizzled veteran, proudly.

Farther on he stopped and pointed to several shallow depressions by the side of the trail.

"Those are buffalo wallows," he explained. "In the hot weather the buffaloes used to roll in them to get rid of flies and insects. I've

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structiveness. The boys gazed at it in silence, and Dick thought of the past.

"I've seen miles of those things," he said, as they rode away.

Late in the afternoon they came in sight of more cottonwoods and a stream, and close beside it a tiny log cabin. When they reached it Dick dismounted and said that the first day's journey had ended. He pulled down the latch and the door swung in. The interior of the cabin was dark and close, and scamperings and squeaks told of the hurried flight of frightened mice. The horses were hobbled and turned out, and a large cow-bell was fastened about Vixen's neck to prevent her from straying too far away. The boys were amused to see the experienced beasts go through the usual manœuvers of hobbled horses. First they lowered their heads and snorted, then they fell on their sides, with a grunt, and began to roll with their feet in the air, then they struggled awkwardly to their feet, shook themselves, and made off

Like many "old-timers," Dick had little respect for anything more complicated than "a good straight alder pole" for catching fish.

After they had complied with his request, the boys jointed their rods and walked to the stream. Their flies had scarcely touched the water before a splendid salmon trout leaped at each lure. Then there was a stirring fight. Up and down and across, into the air, into the depths again, rushing, diving, sulking, and leaping, the gamy fish fought the rods. The boys shouted and Ed slipped and fell into the water, but they held to their rods, and at last the fish grew weary and were guided to the shore. When Dick announced supper they had a splendid catch. They had never enjoyed such fishing, and they had never seen such beautiful fish. They cleaned two large ones, and Dick fried them. The flesh was firm and pink and the boys declared them delicious.

With the darkness came the cold, and they built a camp-fire. Old Dick made a picturesque figure as he sat in the firelight, and the boys fairly thrilled when they glanced at

II

A MOUNTAIN-LION

NEXT day at noon they halted at the edge of the plain. Great spire-like peaks towered above them—they had reached the mountains. While they ate their midday meal the lads studied the rugged country through which they were to pass. Next to the plain were the low ridges, or foothills, clothed with aspen and birch; behind them were the long, steep slopes and an unbroken forest of lodge-pole pines; and then began the bare, uninviting wastes of slide-rock, which extended to the everlasting snow-drifts at the foot of the bleak granite ledges; and above them there was nothing but the sky.

"Here's where we begin to climb," said Dick, when they were again in the saddle.

The trail was rough and difficult, and with

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branches, slippery boulders, and great fallen trees. The boys were compelled to dismount and lead their ponies. They found it a struggle every inch of the way. The poor pack-horses floundered through as best they could, until Vixen wedged herself firmly between two trees and blocked farther progress. Finding herself fast, the irritable old mare immediately began to buck. Dick and the boys hurried to the rescue, and after much effort they finally succeeded in setting her free. Then they resumed the wearisome climb. Unaccustomed to the altitude, the boys suffered considerably from shortness of breath, and they panted along at the rear of the procession. They were not sorry, therefore, when they reached a grassy plateau and Dick ordered a halt.

"Just throw your eyes over the landscape and let me know how you like it," he said, as they seated themselves in the shade.

They were enchanted. Far below them was

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azure sky; and between them and the forest were treacherous, untracked fields of dazzling snow. It was an unsoiled picture of primeval grandeur, just as the red-man had left it. There were miles of virgin forest, and miles more of untouched plain. There was no sign of man or his handiwork. A golden eagle circled upward into the heavens; pine-crows called harshly across the cañons; and from a distance came the muffled roar of a hidden cascade. The boys were silent—the spell of the mountains was upon them.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Dick, smiling.

"It's too fine to talk about," said George, slowly; and Ed nodded his solemn approval.

They had hardly started on when Dick showed them elk tracks. He said they should be able to get some splendid pictures of these noble creatures, and, as nature photography was one of the objects of their expedition, the boys were delighted. Dick explained how

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park which they saw between the trees. There was good reason for his careful approach. In the center of the mountain park stood a magnificent bull elk. The stately animal was drinking from a muddy pool at the base of a large rock. Dick said it was a natural salt-lick. All at once the elk either saw or heard them and raised its sensitive nose into the wind. As it faced them, the boys saw that its horns were in the "velvet." Then it found the danger scent, and it wheeled and trotted briskly away into the woods.

"If I had only had my camera!" lamented Ed. "I'll never again have a chance like that."

"Yes you will, lots of them," promised Dick.

The day was well spent when they finally reached the high plateau where Dick had his cabin. They found it in a corner of a little park. It was an ideal situation. A wall of heavy timber sheltered it from the wind, a stream of crystal clearness supplied water,

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A thrush sang a welcome from the edge of the forest, hundreds of wild flowers nodded familiarly, and a curious pine-squirrel chattered an inquiry from the cabin roof. The boys were delighted.

When they entered the log house they found it similar to their Maine cabin, but considerably smaller. It consisted of one room with a window on each side, a door in front, and two double bunks at the rear. A cook-stove, a pine table covered with oil-cloth, some stools, and a small bench completed the furniture. Everything was in order, and the cooking-utensils were bright and clean.

"How about rustling some supper?" inquired Dick, as he came in with a supply of wood. "If you fellows will go for water, I'll get a fire started and see what I can do with the eatables."

Darkness had fallen, and the boys found the brook by its noise. They heard the tinkle of old Vixen's bell at the other side of the park, and they knew that the horses were grazing near the cabin. They reached the water and

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a moment the boys were too surprised to speak.

"What in blazes was that?" demanded George, rising and peering into the night.

"Blamed if I know," said Ed. "It went by like an express train."

"It must have been a deer."

"Or perhaps an elk," said Ed.

When they returned to the cabin they told Dick they believed that they had heard a deer. He laughed and said they were correct. It had been feeding close to the cabin, and he had frightened it when he went out for a second armful of wood.

After supper they unpacked and stowed away their belongings. While they were busy they heard a mountain-lion scream, and they stopped their work and went to the door to listen. Wild and uncanny, the sound again came to them through the night. Dick said a pair of these beasts had been lingering about since early in the spring. He believed they had their den up on old Cut-Off, a rugged and

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The boys found that an altitude of nine thousand feet means cold nights and mornings. The next day they rose before the sun, and they were thankful for the fire which Dick had started at daylight.

"Kind of frosty for summer-time, isn't it?" he laughed.

"I should say so," replied Ed, shivering violently.

"Wait until you've lived near timber-line for a few weeks, and you'll not mind it," said Dick. "You'll be plenty warm before you get to the top of old Cut-Off."

They hurried through breakfast, for they were anxious to climb the snow-clad peak which they had admired so much the day before. Dick said it would be impossible to take the horses farther than the base of the mountain, and that from there to the summit they would have to depend on their own sturdy legs.

Ed and George went after the three riding-ponies. They saw no sign of them in the park, so they walked to the far end of it and

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"Now why in thunder do you suppose they left the park and entered this howling wilderness?" demanded George, savagely, as he paused to gain breath.

"Let's find them and ask," proposed Ed.

The tracks were fresh, and the boys had little trouble following them. The climb, however, was a hard one. How animals with their front feet hobbled had ever got up there they could not understand. At last they came to another, smaller park, and there they found the horses.

"I guess they must have climbed up here for the view," declared George, between gasps.

"Well, it is certainly worth it," replied Ed. "Just look at those peaks to your right. There's old Cut-Off directly in front of us. Looks as if we might have to do some climbing ourselves before we reach the top."

"Yes. Let's get the horses and start."

They caught Buck and the two broncos and put on their halters and unfastened the

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return to the pack-horses, and several times he halted so abruptly that he almost threw George over backward.

"Found them way up near the stars, didn't you?" laughed Dick.

The boys said they had been to the top of the world.

"It's a funny thing how horses will leave good feed and struggle up through down timber and everything else to stand and shiver on a slab of barren slide-rock. But that is the real horse of it, I reckon."

They packed a lunch, saddled the ponies, and departed for Cut-Off. The trail down into the cañon was steep, and in some places very narrow. But the boys soon saw that there was nothing to fear, for Vic and Skeets were veterans at the game. At the steepest places they simply braced their front legs, sat on their tails, and slid to the end of the incline. Such riding furnished a new experience for the young Easterners, and after the first "slide" they thoroughly enjoyed it.

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A false step meant a slide to the rocky cañon several hundred feet below.

"Give them their heads and sit tight," advised Dick, as Buck made his way across the treacherous incline.

The boys sat straight and gazed between their ponies' ears. Vic and Skeets chose their way with great care, and their young riders made no attempt to guide them.

"Look out!" cried George, who was following Ed.

Ed's pony had stepped on a small, round stone, and one of its rear feet slid from the trail. Ed felt the jar and threw himself forward. For an instant it seemed as if horse and rider must topple to certain death. But the active little mount regained the trail and the danger was passed. Once over this spot, they found the balance of the way steep but safe.

When they arrived in the cañon they were obliged to ford a stream. It was swollen with snow water from the mountains, and the

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again proved their worth and took their riders across in safety.

A level, grass-grown plain extended from the brook to the base of the mountain. The ponies were freed of their saddles and bridles and turned out to graze, while Dick and the boys climbed Cut-Off in search of mountain-lions.

Some old blazes marked a way to the top, and the hunters entered the timber and began to climb. The first part of their way was through a primeval forest of pines and balsams, and the boys were reminded of the north woods. But as they went higher the forest thinned out, parks became more frequent, and the trees dwindled in size. Although Dick was constantly alert for lion tracks, none were found. He said he believed that the pair they were seeking had gone. However, they determined to climb to the top. The boys carried their rifles, and Dick had a Colt's .44 at his hip.

"Helloa! Look here!" he cried, as he stooped over to examine the ground.

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prints, which the boys instantly recognized as bear tracks. The long claws had sunk deep in the soft earth, and there was a half-circle of even, round holes before each great footprint.

"That's a grizzly, and he's no baby, either," declared Dick, as he measured the prints with his hands.

The boys felt a thrill of excitement. They had entered the domains of the most formidable beast on the American continent. They realized that at that moment the monster itself might be within rifle range of them. They began to look expectantly about them.

Dick followed the tracks a little way into the timber; then the trail turned toward lower ground, and as it was at least a day old he abandoned it.

Soon after they left the salt-lick the trees became mere shrubs, twisted and bent veterans of the snow and gale. They finally

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be, if she has young to feed, we'll find the old lioness up here after the lambs."

The climb was exhausting, and the boys rested frequently. They were seated on a boulder, admiring the view, when Ed caught sight of something moving some distance away to the right.

"Look! What is that?" he asked, as he caught George by the sleeve.

"Easy, boys," whispered Dick. "It's our lion."

They crouched among the rocks and waited anxiously for the great cat to approach. It walked slowly along the narrow sheep trail, directly toward the concealed hunters. The boys took note of its lean, sinewy body, its fierce face, and its stealthy, catlike tread. As Dick had said, it was evidently after the young mountain-sheep.

When it came within proper range, Dick whispered his command, and the boys sighted their rifles and fired. An angry snarl fol-

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"You've got him," laughed Dick, as he hurried to the kill. "It's the old man, too. He sneaked up here to have a nice little meal all by himself. Serves him right."

"Was he seeking food for his family?" asked Ed.

"Not much, he wasn't. More likely he was hunting to find his family. You see, he's not much good as a father. The mother hides the kittens or he'd kill every last one of them. When he can't find them he leaves her to shift for herself, while he goes away for a good time."

"Well, if that is the kind of a scamp he is, I'm glad we killed him," declared George.

The boys were delighted with their luck. They wished to preserve the pelt of the lion for a souvenir, and Dick helped them in skinning it. When the task was finished they descended to the horses.

They lunched beside the stream. Then they saddled the ponies and began the long, hard climb to the cabin. On the way they

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III

A DANGEROUS FORD

EARLY next morning the boys were awakened by revolver-shots outside the cabin. They leaped from the bunk and ran out to learn the cause of the commotion. Old Dick was replacing his gun in its leather holster.

"You fellows were sleeping away your patriotism, so I thought I'd let you know it is the Fourth of July," he laughed.

"By ginger, that's so!" cried George. "Where's our flag?"

"Right where it should be," said Dick, as he pointed proudly to the roof-peak of the cabin.

The boys saw a small, weather-stained edition of "Old Glory" flying from a pine

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let's go inside and punish the breakfast," he suggested.

When the meal was over Dick outlined his plan of action for the term of their stay.

"Now, your folks have asked me to show you over the country, and to put you in good shape for the fall and winter. You say you are out here for adventures and pictures. That gives us leeway for a pretty good programme, and one which I think I can make interesting. To-morrow we'll pack the outfit and start on a two-months' hike into the mountains. What do you say?"

"I'm for it, strong," declared Ed.

"So am I," agreed George. "It will be great."

"All right. Our first stop will be Catamount Cañon, where you'll get some good fishing. We'll spend a few days there, and then we'll cross the mountains into Horseshoe Basin; you'll probably find elk in there. Then we'll climb the peaks to the north of the basin and try for a snapshot at mountain-sheep. We'll work down the other side into the

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quarters at the Lazy Y Ranch. But, seeing that you fellows don't know the country, I don't suppose you savey where I'm aiming to take you."

"The trip you have outlined certainly sounds like the real thing to me," declared Ed, enthusiastically.

"Why, it will be a regular three-ring circus," laughed George.

Dick took a well-worn government map from the shelf and spread it upon the table. Then with his pipe-stem he traced the proposed course and showed them where they were going. The boys were surprised at the recorded height of some of the mountains, and Dick assured them it was "quite a climb" to their top.

Once the trip had been decided upon, they began to sort and pack the duffle. At Dick's suggestion the boys had left some unnecessary equipment in the hotel at the settlement; so that all they had with them was *their* camping outfit of blankets, utensils, *and* clothes. The lads were enthusiastic

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and Ed and George were anxious to be off. Dick brought in the horses and showed the boys how to throw the diamond hitch. Two of the pack animals rebelled at first; but the old prospector soon convinced them of their folly, and the job of packing the outfit was completed without further interruption. When everything was ready, Dick wrote a note telling where he was going and how long he would be away, and tacked it to the door. The boys expressed surprise at seeing the key left over the portal.

"You see, there are few thieves in this part of the country, and we leave the latch-string out to help one another along," laughed Dick.

Then he mounted Buck and led the lads away on their long journey into the mountains. As usual, Vixen, the old bell-mare, objected to leaving, but some loud and forceful urging from Dick finally got her into motion, and, once going, she gave no more trouble.

"Wouldn't it be great if we should run into a grizzly?" said George.

journey from the cabin. To reach it they had to descend to the plain, travel diagonally across it, climb a low ridge of foothills, and toil up one side of a steep mountain and slide down the opposite side into the cañon. As they rode along they continually heard the rumble of sliding snow-fields. Dick pointed to wide swaths through the timber which had been made by avalanches of snow. He declared them a constant menace to all who traveled in the high country at that season of the year.

Early in the afternoon they encountered their first obstacle, when they halted at the edge of a badly swollen stream. It looked threatening, and its sullen roar made Dick shake his head. For some time he sat and watched the yellow water race past. Then he rose and made known his intention of crossing.

"We might better tackle it now than in the morning," he said, calmly. "We'll cross

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found a suitable place from which to make his attempt. Then he dismounted and tightened Vixen's pack. Seizing her lead rope, he mounted Buck and urged him into the flood. But Vixen absolutely refused to enter the water. She stood at the river's edge with her neck extended and her huge feet wide apart, apparently as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar.

"Hey, you fellows, get busy there!" called Dick, impatiently.

The boys found poles and began a vigorous attack from the rear. Unable to withstand their assault, Vixen snorted in pretended terror and floundered into the torrent with the awkwardness of an elephant.

Then Buck began to swim, and Vixen followed him. The current was strong, and the experienced mustang, finding himself unable to cope with it, began a diagonal course toward the opposite shore. It was a dangerous

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puffing and snorting at his heels. Dick turned and waved his hat, and Ed and George attempted a faint-hearted cheer.

"Bring across the rest of the outfit," shouted Dick.

For a moment the boys hesitated and looked at each other for encouragement.

"We've got to make good," said Ed.

"We will," declared George, resolutely.

"Hang to your saddles, and remember to stick to your ponies," cautioned Dick, as the boys brought the remaining pack-horses down the bank. "Don't try to guide them; give them their heads and they'll bring you through."

The broncos were not afraid, and, encouraged by their boldness, the boys rode fearlessly into the torrent and dragged the unwilling pack-animals after them. The glacial water from the snow-fields chilled them to the bone. As soon as the ponies lost their footing and began to swim, the boys found it difficult to remain in the saddle. They hung on as best they could, and managed to drag the floundering pack-animals

to crowd and interfere with each other. Dick saw disaster brewing, and he began to shout and signal for the boys to separate. They tried to obey, but in making the attempt Ed came to grief.

"Let him go! Let him go!" yelled Dick, excitedly.

Ed had turned Vic downstream, but the pack-horse refused to leave its comrade, and in endeavoring to drag it the unfortunate rider was pulled from the saddle. He sank beneath the great yellow waves, and George cried out in fear. But a moment later Ed's head bobbed into view farther down the stream, and Dick galloped along the bank, lariat in hand. Ed fought valiantly for his life, and Dick shouted encouragement. By a turn of the current the swimmer was thrown against a partly submerged tree-trunk and he had the presence of mind to throw his arms about it and hold on.

George had meantime reached the shore in

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But Ed was in a dangerous situation. The tree to which he clung protruded only a foot or two above the water, and the surging yellow waves broke about his shoulders. He was compelled to hug the slippery support with all the power of his arms and legs to keep from being swept away. It was an exhausting ordeal. Many times he was entirely submerged by the larger waves, which passed completely over him and took away his breath. To make matters worse, the icy water began to sap his strength. It was only a question of minutes before he would be compelled to relax his grip and go to his death in the glacial torrent.

Dick ran to the water's edge and threw his lariat. The loop fell short, and George groaned. The old plainsman frantically hauled in his rope; then he mounted Buck and urged him into the stream until the water surged about his flanks. Rising in his stirrups, Dick grasped the pommel of his saddle with his left hand and prepared to swing his lariat with his right.

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"Now hold your head back from the tree,"

this time it landed true. It fell over Ed's head and slid down so that he managed to get it beneath his arms. Dick instantly pulled it taut.

"When I begin to pull, you cast loose and strike out for shore, and we'll help you make it," he shouted. "Are you ready?"

Ed nodded, and Dick turned Buck for the bank, dragging Ed from his support. George ran into the water to help, and between them they got Ed to shore. Battered and bruised, he retained consciousness just long enough to smile up into their anxious faces. Then he shivered and closed his eyes.

Dick ordered George to build a fire, while he rolled Ed across a log to get the water out. When the fire was blazing Dick sent George to the packs for blankets. He wrapped Ed in them and stretched him out before the flames. Then he went to his own pack and returned with a flask. By that time Ed had opened his eyes, and Dick gave him a swallow of brandy in spite of a protest.

"You'll be all right in a little while," he told him.

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an hour he was able to rise and walk to the tent which Dick had already erected. He changed to dry clothing and sat down to an early supper little the worse for his trying experience. The horses had reached the shore in safety, and only a few of the things in the packs were wet. These were soon dried before the fire, and by the time darkness came everything was snug and ready for the night.

Next day at noon they ate their first meal in Catamount Cañon. It was not the great, gloomy place they had expected to see. It was like a meadow between two towering walls of granite. Through it flowed a merry little stream which made the boys think of trout. But Dick said it contained no fish, and Ed and George lost interest. As they traveled farther the cañon widened to form a great circular basin. Here they found an inviting grove of cottonwoods and plenty of grass for the horses, and Dick decided to make it his camp-site.

The boys looked about them with surprise and admiration. They were forced to re-

dotted with wild flowers, the mountain-sides were clothed with dense forests of pine, and spire-like granite peaks rose skyward from great slanting snow-fields which glistened in the rays of the setting sun.

"Well, this isn't such a bad place, after all, is it?" laughed Dick.

"I should say not; I had no idea that cañons could be so attractive," said Ed.

"Nor I," added George.

They helped Dick unpack the horses, and, as there was little danger of their wandering away, they were not hobbled. Then they put up the tent. They braced it with poles and dug a shallow trench around the outside. The tarpaulin was stretched over poles to make a "cook-shanty" for rainy days and a storehouse for supplies.

That night, as they sat before the camp-fire, the boys recalled tales of the "Forty-niners" in their adventurous race for gold in California. It seemed as if they had at last entered that land of romance themselves. They felt like real "soldiers of fortune."

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IV

THE LOCOED STEER

DAWN was announced by a pack of howling coyotes. The boys awakened to find the tent flap open and Dick missing. They heard him outside at the fire, and they knew that breakfast was ready.

"Ouch! I'm as stiff as a board," protested Ed, as he crawled painfully from his blankets.

"Pile out and put some breakfast under your belt and you'll feel lots better," advised Dick, as he thrust his head inside the tent. "Listen to those coyotes; they sound like a band of Injun squaws."

"That's not very complimentary to the squaws," laughed George.

"Did you ever hear them try to sing?" asked Dick. "Well, wait until you do and

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"In the upper end of the cañon, I reckon; I heard old Vixen's bell up there when I came out," said Dick. "After breakfast you fellows can look them up. I've heard that this brook carries float gold, and just for fun I intend to do a little panning."

Anxious to explore the farther end of the cañon, the boys set out to find the horses. Dick thought they would find them feeding in a grassy park up near the top of the divide. There was no danger of losing themselves, for to return they had only to follow the brook to camp. When the boys came in sight of the park they turned from the brook and entered the timber to begin the climb. Then they heard Vixen's bell rattling furiously, and a moment later the horses came into view.

"Here are the horses. What is wrong?" cried Ed.

The animals seemed to be in a panic. They would run a short distance, and then they would stop and face back the way they had come. It was evident that they had

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"Let them go. Dick will stop them," said George. "We'll follow back on their tracks and learn what frightened them."

"But we haven't any guns," protested Ed.

"Oh, never mind. Let's take a chance. I don't believe it is anything very serious. Why, I've seen horses run from a scrap of paper!"

"All right, I'm game; but if we run up against a grizzly I shall break all records for the hundred yards, stiff as I am," warned Ed, laughing.

The trail was easily followed, and they saw that it led direct to the grassy plateau mentioned by Dick. It was steep and the climb was hot work, but the curiosity of the boys kept them going. They finally arrived at the edge of the park; a large red-and-white animal was grazing over near the far side.

"What did I tell you?" laughed George. "It's nothing more deadly than an old red-and-white cow. Let's shoo her down to camp and surprise Dick."

"A cow would never frighten horses as

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The boys walked from the timber and started across the open. Then the animal raised its head, and they halted irresolutely as they took note of the enormous spread of horns.

"Great Scott, it's a steer! It looks half wild," declared George.

"Let's shoo it down to camp," laughed Ed, mockingly.

Meantime, having made out what they were, the steer was performing some very disquieting antics. It shook its head, pawed the ground, and began to bellow fiercely; then it advanced.

"I think it is more pleasant back where we came from. Let's return," suggested George.

They turned and hurried toward the timber. But before they had gone ten paces the steer lowered its gigantic head and charged.

"Run for a tree!" shouted George.

The boys ran at top speed, and the infuriated steer thundered after them. It gained rapidly, and when they finally reached the edge of the forest and made for the nearest

and the steer stopped short beneath them. It circled the trees and bawled furiously. Then it backed away a few paces and made several charges into the open. Wheeling as quickly as a cat, it returned and began to tear up the ground. It seemed to be crazed. Foam dripped from its jaws, its eyes were bloodshot and wild, and its whole appearance was that of an animal possessed.

It was some minutes before the boys recovered sufficient breath to talk. They sat quietly in adjoining trees and looked solemnly down at the raging beast below them. They were thinking of a somewhat similar experience in Maine when George had mistaken bear cubs for young foxes.

"I wonder how long this will keep up?" asked George.

"Until something comes to attract his attention," replied Ed, gloomily.

But at that very moment the steer left the timber and trotted to the edge of the park. It raised its head and stood looking intently

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"Look," said Ed. "There is some animal over there."

Just then the steer uttered its defiant roar and trotted toward its new-found adversary. The latter raised itself at the sound, and the boys identified it and became greatly excited.

"It's a grizzly and her two cubs!" cried George.

"And she's a whopper! Now for some fun."

The bear evidently realized her danger, for she cuffed her cubs into the woods. Then she turned her snout inquisitively toward the steer. The latter had halted in the center of the park, where he stood throwing dirt over himself and going through other preliminaries of battle. But all this vain show of bravery did not seem to impress the bear, for she had no thought of retreating. She was a huge brute, and she looked to be a worthy antagonist for the great red-and-white steer.

"It looks as if she intends to fight," said George.

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"If she does, the battle will be worth

frenzy, the steer lowered his head and charged, and the grizzly rose upon her hind legs to meet him. They came together, and the impact was terrific. The bear took the blow full in the chest and was thrown upon her back by the force of it. But she regained her feet instantly, and as the steer tried to pierce her with his horns she dodged to one side and landed a blow on his neck that dropped him to his knees. Her knifelike claws had opened a long gash which bled freely, and the steer became a raging fury.

Just at this fatal moment the cubs ventured upon the field of battle and the boys expected to see them instantly annihilated. But before the steer had a chance to reach them the old bear rushed upon them, showing her fangs and roaring so loudly that they turned and fled, squealing with terror.

Having mistaken the mother bear's action for flight, the steer rushed her. She had just time to wheel and face him, and then he was

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his head and stood to meet the shock. It was a stupid and fatal error, for with one sweep of her deadly paw she crumpled him to the earth. Before he could rise she was upon him. His fate was sealed; there was no escape. Held down by the weight of her body, the steer was helpless against her murderous attack. He struggled desperately to rise, but the bear held him beneath her as easily as a dog would have held a rat. She had gone mad at the taste of blood. Two blows from her paw crushed his skull, and when she had killed him she proceeded to rend and tear his body.

"Come on, I've seen enough," said George. "Do you suppose it is safe to descend?"

"I don't know," replied Ed, uncertainly, as the bear raised her head and looked across the park.

But she finally rose and ambled off in search of her cubs, and the boys slid quickly to the ground. They wasted no time in conversation as they hurried down the moun-

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But it was a false alarm, and as nothing appeared they hurried along all the faster. They finally reached the brook and sat down to cool off.

"Whew! this has been what I should call an exciting morning," said George.

"I never saw such a fierce 'cow' in all my life," said Ed, turning the laugh on his friend.

It was some time past noon, and they hurried toward the tent. Dick was waiting for them, and one glance at their flushed, hot faces told him that something out of the ordinary had occurred.

"What kept you? Did you strike a bear?" he inquired, smiling.

"Yes, and a wild steer," said Ed.

Then they told their tale of adventure, and Dick listened attentively.

"That steer must have been a 'loco,'" was his comment.

"A what?" asked George.

"Locoed, crazy," explained Dick. "They get that way sometimes and leave the herd

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of a 'loco' running slap-bang into a railroad train."

The boys were for taking their rifles and going after the old grizzly and her cubs. But Dick declared a wounded grizzly with babies an uncertain proposition, and said he preferred to accompany them.

"We'll go up there about dusk and wait for her," he promised.

When they had finished eating he brought his gold-pan. He handed them a small magnifying-glass and told them to look into the bottom of the pan. Scattered through a mass of what looked like black earth they saw some tiny yellow flakes.

"That is float gold," explained Dick. "There is not enough in a pan to make it worth bothering with. Most of the streams through this country carry some of it, and there are fellows who get plumb daffy when they see it. It always means a fortune to them, and they'll tell you that it must come from some near-by ledge, and that if you find

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fine and it may be the accumulation of many little scattered pockets. However, I'll try it farther up the brook to-morrow and dig deeper. If I find bigger flakes or wheatlike nuggets it will pay to look into it."

The boys were much interested, and they insisted on accompanying Dick to the scene of his find and panning some for themselves. Under his directions they soon learned the knack of shaking the gold-pan so that with each turn some of the water and the lighter material splashed over, while the heavier gold flakes settled to the bottom. However, when Dick assured them that they were earning less than five cents to the pan they were quite willing to stop.

"Then the mere finding of 'colors,' as you call it, isn't necessarily true proof that you are on the road to a fortune," laughed Ed, when they had returned to the tent.

"No indeed; more likely it's proof that you're on the way to the poorhouse; that is, if you don't figure faster than you dig," declared Dick, solemnly.

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thrills of excitement. They did not know at what moment they would come face to face with the wounded bear, and they believed it would attack them at sight.

"Yes, she's likely to be some sassy," laughed Dick, when they spoke of it.

But they reached the park without an encounter, and made their way to the carcass of the steer. It had been terribly mauled and torn in the fight; but there was nothing to show that the bear had returned to feast upon her victim. Dick stooped over and examined a brand on the steer's flank. He rose, laughing, and pointed to the mark.

"He was a 'loco,' all right. He's marked with the brand of the Lazy Y Ranch, so you can judge how far he has wandered."

"Why is it called the Lazy Y Ranch?" inquired Ed.

"When a letter is branded in horizontally instead of vertically ranchmen say it's lying down, or lazy, and the ranch takes the name of the letter. However, there's no reproach in it," Dick hastened to explain.

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As they had seen nothing to indicate that

easy range of the bait and sat down to watch. But a strong wind came up, and Dick said that even if she did return, the old bear would be almost sure to get their scent.

"If she does, she'll scamper off long before we see her," he said.

"She won't if she is as bold as she was when she saw the steer," whispered Ed.

"She'll act differently with humans," declared Dick.

Twilight gradually crept up the mountainside and the night shadows closed about the summit. The light was uncertain, and in a few minutes it would be impossible to shoot. They waited until they could not distinguish the rifle sights; then Dick rose and said it was time to go home.

"Do you think she'll come back to-morrow?" asked Ed, anxiously, as they scrambled down the mountain.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Dick.

It was dark long before they reached the tent, but Dick never wavered in his course. The horses were grazing close to camp, and

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V

TWO SHOTS AT A BEAR

"HOW would you like to go fishing?" asked Dick, next morning. "There's a fine little lake on the other side of the mountain you were on yesterday. It's full of trout, and I'm hankering to taste some of them. You'll see a trail leading down to it from the summit. It's a bit steep, but if you keep your eyes open and your feet moving I reckon you can make it."

The boys accepted instantly. Dick put up a lunch and said he would prospect while they were gone.

"Not that I expect to find anything," he laughed. "But I've heard so many yarns about this cañon, and now that I'm here I intend to try it out for myself."

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The lads wished him luck and started for

looked the possibility of an encounter with the grizzly, and they determined to arm themselves for an emergency.

They climbed to the park and found the body of the steer almost devoured. Two gray forms slunk away into the shadows, and the boys knew that a pack of coyotes had been feeding on the kill.

At last they reached the summit and saw the little sheet of blue water far below. The view was superb and the boys sat down to enjoy it. Ridge after ridge of great somber peaks showed themselves against the horizon, and the lads realized that they were in the heart of the Rockies. On one side they looked down into the winding confines of Catamount Cañon, on the other side into a circular basin, and in the center of it was the lake, surrounded by a forest of evergreens. The mountain fell away sheer on that side, and the descent looked steep and dangerous.

They rose and began a search for the trail.

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RIDGE AFTER RIDGE OF GREAT SOMBER PEAKS SHOWED THEMSELVES AGAINST THE HOR
AND THE LADS REALIZED THAT THEY WERE IN THE HEART OF THE ROCKIES

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incline and apparently dropped into space. They believed it to be the trail Dick had mentioned, but they had grave doubts. The longer they studied it the more perilous it appeared. It looked like a foolhardy way to reach the lake, and they dreaded to think of the climb back.

"Oh, for the wings of a dove!" sang Ed.

"It must be safer than it looks," declared George.

"Let's hope so."

"Well, let's start. We can turn back if we get stuck."

They walked over the rim and began to descend. Then they saw their error. What they had mistaken for the trail was only a shallow gully worn by the water. However, once they had started, there was nothing to stop them. With each step they found the descent growing steeper. The footing was loose and uncertain, and they began to slide. In vain they tried to turn back and to check their speed. Faster and faster they went, and, finally, to keep from falling they were

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obliged to run. Then they lost all control

stones rattled around their ankles, and great boulders bounded along in their wake. There was nothing to do but to keep going. The whole mountain seemed to be sliding after them, and they believed that they had started an avalanche. They saw the lake coming to meet them as they raced down the incline. It seemed as if they must run through the very center of it. But the footing suddenly changed, and they "put on the brakes." Then the incline gradually lessened, and they came to a stop in a grove of pines beside the lake.

"That was a run and a half," panted Ed, looking up the way they had come.

"I guess that is what they call riding a slide," laughed George. "It's exciting sport, isn't it?"

"I should say it— Look! there's a bear!" cried Ed, excitedly.

He pointed toward a narrow arm of the little lake, apparently the outlet, and George

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"Wait a minute. Come over here behind this tree. Do you know what he is doing? He's fishing. Let's watch him. I've read accounts of it, and I should like to see exactly how he does it."

They went into concealment and sat down to watch their rival fill his "creel." Unaware that it was being spied upon, the bear continued its fishing. For some minutes it remained motionless, and one might have thought it asleep. But suddenly it drove its paw deeper into the water and swept a good-sized trout upon the bank. The fish was instantly crushed and devoured, and bruin set himself for another victim.

"Isn't that a great trick?" whispered Ed, enthusiastically.

"He seems to be the original barefoot boy when it comes to catching fish with home-made tackle," laughed George.

They watched the interesting performance for some time. Then Ed determined to use the camera instead of the rifle.

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"George, I intend to try for a picture.

"Great!"

Ed slung the camera from his shoulders, and kept the rifle ready for instant use. Then he crawled carefully into some low bushes and began to stalk the bear. It was necessary to keep his face in the wind, and to make sure of it he stopped each time the breeze faltered and sought it with his moistened finger.

The bear lay with its back toward him and seemed to be entirely unconscious of his approach. Several fish were swept to their doom as Ed advanced. He heard the bear growl as it crushed them beneath its paws. He was a bit curious as to what would happen if he should be discovered. Perhaps the surly fisherman would resent his intrusion, and then there would be a fight. He recalled his encounter with a bear in Maine, and he wondered if this one would be as aggressive.

After much careful stalking Ed got within twenty-five yards of his quarry. He stopped there and took the camera from its

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good picture, Ed pressed the lever. The picture was made, and with hastening fingers Ed wound another film into place. He replaced the camera and determined to advance still closer.

But before he had gone ten feet the bear either heard or scented him. It rose and turned to face the danger. Up into the air went its trim muzzle, and its nostrils began to twitch nervously. Ed knew it was trying to place him. Its pose was perfect, he had the opportunity of a lifetime, and, reckless of all other results, the enthusiastic photographer jumped to his feet and snapped a picture. The surprised bear held its ground until the exposure had been made, then it uttered a startled "woof" and ambled awkwardly away into the woods. Ed threw his hat into the air and cheered, and George bounded from his hiding-place.

"What in blazes was the matter?" he inquired, as soon as he reached his friend. "Why didn't you shoot him?"

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felt like a murderer. If he had put up a fight I should have been forced to defend myself. But he was such a good-natured old chap that I would rather show him as a trophy and know that he is still alive. You know Old Ben said any 'tenderfoot' can kill an animal, but it takes a real woodsman to get near enough to snap its picture."

"You're right, old man. I'm proud of you. Let's adopt Dick's principle. We'll kill only to fill an empty stomach or in self-defense."

They turned to the lake and put their rods in order for fishing. The water was unusually clear, and near the shore they saw enough splendid fish to arouse their enthusiasm.

"There are fish enough in this little lake to supply a city," declared George.

"It looks like an overstocked aquarium," laughed Ed.

The first cast hooked a splendid rainbow trout, and Ed was the lucky angler. The

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the mate, and as luck would have it their lines crossed.

"Slack your line!" cried Ed, excitedly.

"Can't," replied George, through clenched teeth.

While they hesitated the fish circled each other, and the lines became hopelessly entwined. The poles bent threateningly as the fish began to pull against each other, and each angler saw defeat staring him in the face.

"Reel in, then!" Ed ordered, savagely.

"Can't; mine is going out," yelled George.

Then each accused the other of criminal carelessness. However, the fish were well hooked, and after strenuous efforts the boys succeeded in landing both of them. There was a difference of only a few ounces between the prizes, and Ed and George laughed and shook hands.

It was simply a question of how many they wished to take, for the little lake fairly teemed

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backed their packs and set out on the return journey. They stopped at the foot of the slide and tried to figure out an easier way to the top. It seemed a long way off and the climb looked impossible.

"I wish we could go up as easily as we came down," sighed George.

"It certainly looks like a climb," said Ed. "But we may as well tackle it; the sooner we start the quicker we'll get there."

But as soon as they began to ascend they lost heart. It appeared to be steeper than when they came down. Ed led the way, and he started straight up; but the course was impracticable, and he veered off at a right angle. For fifty yards or so they walked on the sides of their feet and endeavored to make their way diagonally across the incline. When this painful toil gained them nothing, they tried to ascend by a series of short, heart-breaking sprints. Stumbling, scrambling, and crawling, they persisted until they had gained a scant hundred yards. The

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resting a little they made another attempt, but it ended as disastrously as the first, and they became discouraged.

"Whew! I'm afraid we're here to stay," panted George.

"We are going at it wrong. There must be some sort of a trail to the top," declared Ed.

"Well, let's scout around and see if we can find it."

"Hold on! Look over there to the right. What is that black thing? By ginger, it's moving!" cried Ed.

"Our friend, the bear. And he's going to the top!"

They watched the ungainly creature climb toward the summit. It seemed to be following some sort of a trail, and the boys' hopes revived. They waited until the bear was two-thirds of the way up, then they hurried along the base of the slide. They came upon a well-worn, narrow path and followed it. The trail wound back and forth across the incline and finally brought them to the top. The bear had disappeared, and the boys sat

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"It seems so. I guess that trail is the only way up and the safe way down. We should have looked more carefully before we chose the gully."

"Well, it's all over and we are here to tell the tale, so let's go on."

They rose and started down the opposite side of the mountain. The brook was in sight far below them, and when they had gone farther they saw the tent and the horses. A covey of spruce-grouse, or "fool-hens," flushed and alighted in trees directly above the boys. Ed was tempted to shoot off their heads, but he suddenly remembered the game-laws and lowered his rifle.

By the time they reached camp the cañon was in shadow. They found Dick preparing to go in search of them. Their long absence had worried him and he had concluded that they were lost. He asked if they had found the trail, and the boys smiled and said they had—one way.

"One way!" cried Dick. "What do you mean?"

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"Why, we started to follow a gully go-

"You rode the slide! Well, of all fool— How did you get back?"

"We saw a bear climbing the slide, and we followed him and found the trail," said George.

"Well, you've sure been lucky; but don't try it again. There's no need of busting this partnership so early in the game," laughed the old plainsman.

As darkness settled down, a cold wind swept through the cañon, and the boys began to shiver. They made a big fire and sat close beside it.

"It doesn't feel much like midsummer, does it?" said George.

"This wind is coming from the snow-fields," explained Dick.

The boys asked him what success he had with his panning. He said he had found the same unprofitable sprinkling of gold flakes as on the day previous.

"There's nothing worth staying here for,

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VI

A NIGHT OF UNCERTAINTY

THE camp was astir at daylight, and while Dick busied himself with the fire the boys started out to round up the horses. They saw no signs of them in the cañon and concluded that they had returned to the mountain park.

"That's a deuce of a climb to make before breakfast," grumbled George.

"I know it; but we've got to get them ready for an early start," said Ed.

"I've come to the conclusion that Western horses are like balloons," laughed George.

"How so?"

"Because the moment you unfasten them they go straight up out of sight."

Old Vixen's bell sounded from the grassy plateau, and, guided by it, the boys soon found

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bell-mare snorted and trotted into the woods at the opposite side of the park. The other horses followed her, and the lads looked at each other in disgust.

"We certainly are two chumps," declared Ed.

"I agree with you, Ed. We should have circled around them and entered the park at the other end."

"Exactly; then they would have run down into the cañon and we could have driven them to camp."

"Well, there is only one way to get them now," declared George.

"What way is that?"

"We must separate and head them off. They can't go very far or very fast in the timber, and by hustling a bit we can turn them back."

They hurried into the woods and sought to keep the horses between them. The mountain was steep and the slope was covered with fallen trees. Led by the experienced

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plunged ahead at reckless speed. But try as they might they could not catch the renegades; and to exasperate them still further the horses began to climb.

"We may as well take it easy," panted George, as he toiled up to Ed. "They are going to the very top, and we can't stop them. Let them go, and perhaps when they bump their heads against the sky they'll be glad enough to let us take them back to earth."

Vixen finally stopped to graze in a little park high up near the summit. The boys approached carefully, and at last got the bridles on Vic and Skeets. Then they mounted. To their delight the two veteran cowponies immediately began to round-up the balance of the band. Wheeling and turning, they drove their companions down the mountain-side toward the camp.

"Good afternoon," laughed Dick, as the boys brought the horses within reach of his lariat. He roped Buck, and then he helped

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"Say, Dick, there are easier tasks than catching horses," laughed George, between mouthfuls.

"You bet," agreed the old prospector.

Within an hour the little cavalcade was in motion. As usual, Dick led, the pack-horses followed, and the boys brought up the rear. They forded the brook and began the steep, uncertain climb up the mountain that rose between them and Horseshoe Basin. Before they had gone far the riders were obliged to dismount. There was no trail, and it took considerable effort to keep the pack-animals in line. Vixen persisted in choosing her own way and, as it usually led toward the bottom of the cañon, it required much hard work to keep her with the outfit. Then she seemed to scent the luxuriant grasses on the other side of the mountain and, settling into her stride, she toiled faithfully to the summit.

"Well, there's our new home," said Dick, when they had reached the top.

The boys looked down into a long, wide

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of pine. A brook showed like a silver thread, and Dick said it was one which long years ago had emptied into Catamount Cañon. It looked like a suitable place for beaver, and the boys wondered if they would see any.

"It certainly seems inviting down there," said Ed.

As they carefully chose their way down the mountain, George called attention to some animals approaching the brook. Dick said they were elk, and the boys were interested at once.

"You'll see plenty of game over here," was Dick's prophecy.

It was past noon when they finally reached the level country, and they decided to forego the midday meal. The valley gave promise of good sport, for there were abundant signs of game. The elk they had seen from the mountain had disappeared, but elk trails were everywhere.

"This beats Catamount Cañon," declared Ed.

"I think so," agreed Dick.

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there some day. Perhaps we'll find mountain-sheep."

Their talk was interrupted by the sound of a rifle-shot somewhere on the mountain to their left. The pack-horses stopped and cocked their ears and the three travelers halted their ponies. They heard two more shots from the same place, and old Vixen raised her head and snorted.

"Who can that be?" asked George.

"I don't know," replied Dick. "Looks like we've got neighbors. I didn't suppose there was any one within miles of here, except ourselves."

"Probably we shall find a camp farther along the stream," suggested Ed.

They heard nothing more from the unknown marksman, so they resumed their journey. The boys noticed, however, that Dick was carefully searching the country as he went along, and they believed that the shots had made him curious.

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"I don't know. Let's make camp in that bunch of cottonwoods. It's a likely-looking spot."

They unpacked the horses and turned them loose. Then they erected the tent and started a fire.

"How's your appetite?" inquired Dick, bringing forth the eatables.

"Fine!" came from the boys with one accord.

"All right; it's a good sign. We'll cook a big feed and make it do for dinner and supper."

While they ate the twilight gathered, and by the time the dishes had been washed it was dark. Although they had purposely caused their fire to send up a thick column of smoke, no one had answered their signal of hospitality, and Dick was puzzled.

"If anybody is camped here, it seems like they should have looked us over before now," he said, thoughtfully. "I don't exactly savey it."

"Perhaps they don't wish to meet us," proposed Ed.

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"You don't suppose those shots were fired to give warning of our arrival, do you?" George asked.

"No; if they are that scary about meeting us they wouldn't be likely to show that they're here. I think they fired those shots before they saw us."

Just then they heard something stirring inside the tent. They took the pocket light and tiptoed toward the sound. Dick smiled and placed a finger across his lips. From the noise the boys expected to encounter nothing less formidable than a bear. They suddenly realized that they were unarmed; their weapons were in the tent with the intruder. But Dick seemed unconcerned, and they took courage. He pulled aside the tent flap and George flashed the light. At that instant a large, ratlike creature, with a flat, bushy tail, scampered under the rear of the tent.

"That's a pack-rat," Dick explained. "They're bad medicine. If they begin to

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from the camper's food-supply, and that it would carry away and hide anything from a rubber boot to a sewing-needle.

Before they retired they made a pile of their luggage and covered it with the tarpaulin. The boys had previously "ditched the tent," as digging a drain around it is called. Dick had brought in old Vixen and picketed her near camp. He had left the hobbles on the other horses, and the boys were well pleased, for it meant an easy round-up in the morning.

"Well, we're all fixed for the night," declared Dick, as he dropped a fresh log upon the fire. "To-morrow we'll want to ride around and look the place over, so I thought I'd keep the ponies handy."

The boys had slept for only a few hours when they were roused by a flash of light. A terrific wind was roaring through the valley and the tent bulged and tugged at its fastenings. The front seemed to be open and the flaps fluttered and snapped.

"What is going on?" inquired George, drowsily, as he sat up and reached for his

the tent, and the boys looked about them. Dick was missing. A crash of thunder followed. By the time George had found his lamp Dick came in with a sack of flour and some of the more perishable supplies from the larder.

"We're in for an 'old snorter,'" he said, as he laced the front of the tent. "It's a lucky thing for us we're trenched. There'll be a young river running around us before this lets up."

The wind increased in violence, and it seemed as though the tent must be carried away. The boys rose, and Dick had them help him distribute some of the heavier articles along the bottom of the canvas to hold it down.

Then the storm broke upon them. The lightning snapped, the thunder crashed, and the rain fell in torrents. The wind shook the tent as a terrier shakes a rat. Driven by the gale, the rain came through the canvas in the form of a fine mist. They heard a horse call nervously.

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dazzling flash of lightning came at the same moment. The effect was startling. Overcome with fear, Vixen dragged her picket stake and bolted. In blind panic she collided with the tent; the supports gave way, and the dripping canvas fell upon the heads of those beneath.

After a wild scramble in the dark Dick and the boys finally crawled from beneath the wreckage. For a moment they were overwhelmed by the fury of the storm. Then Dick shouted his orders, and Ed and George sprang into action. They threw themselves upon the flapping canvas and held it down, while Dick found the ropes and made them fast to the nearest trees. Then they raised the tent into some semblance of its original shape, and, thankful for even such doubtful protection, the dripping campers crawled beneath it. They sat huddled about the lantern, hoping that their insecure little refuge would weather the storm.

"It's a lucky thing the pegs held; other-

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VII

TIMBER WOLVES

THEY rose at daylight, and were relieved to see the horses grazing near camp. While Dick searched for dry wood, Ed started after the horses, and George went to the brook for water. All signs of the storm had disappeared and the day dawned clear and beautiful.

"We'll stay here long enough to dry things out some, then we'll move on toward the head of the valley. We'll camp near the base of those snow-caps yonder. That will bring us within reach of the sheep country and give us a chance to explore the basin and side-hills as well," proposed Dick, at breakfast.

The sheep country! The mere mention of it made the boys' blood tingle with anticipation. It brought to mind vivid word pictures

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snow-fields, dizzy heights, and great, jagged peaks. They were anxious to be off, to climb to the aerial domains of that sure-footed mountaineer, the Rocky Mountain sheep, or big-horn.

The horses were finally packed, and they started for the other end of the basin. They traveled slowly, for they were in no hurry, and the day was too fine to spoil with haste. By noon they had covered half their journey, and Dick ordered a halt.

"Let's amble along easy like; this day was just made for loafing," laughed the old plainsman, as he dismounted and pulled the saddle from Buck.

The boys found the invitation irresistible, and, although they were anxious to reach the sheep country, they dismounted and turned out Vic and Skeets. The day was perfect, and, refreshed by the deluge of the night before, Horseshoe Basin had been transformed into a paradise. Its carpet of green was

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HORSESHOE BASIN

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sides, the stream gurgled invitingly, and while Dick attended to lunch the lads jointed their fish-rods and began to fish.

"I thought so," laughed Dick, when they answered his summons empty-handed. "This is a glacial stream from the peaks, and it's not likely to furnish much sport."

After lunch Dick lay down in the shade to enjoy his pipe, and the boys took advantage of the opportunity to study the wild life about them. They were particularly interested in a pair of water-ouzels, slate-colored birds about the size and color of the Eastern catbird. The ouzels held forth beside the stream, and the boys watched them through a pair of binoculars. But the birds were so agile and so rapid in their movements that it was a task to keep them in focus. They plunged boldly into the icy current at its swiftest part, and often remained submerged for half a minute or more. They seemed to be perfectly at home in the turbid little torrent, and Ed called them real "water babies."

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Dick was saddling Buck, and the boys turned from the brook to join him. On the way back they discovered a colony of what they believed to be "prairie-dogs." They were active little creatures, about nine inches long, dark brown on the back, lighter underneath, with short tails and the regular "prairie-dog" head. They sat up and regarded the boys curiously, and Ed took several pictures. Dick called them gophers.

"At least that's what we old-timers call them," he said. "But a fellow came out here for the government several years ago, and he called them *spermophiles*, or something like that."

Before they had gone a mile they began to see game. Three mule deer, a small band of elk, and several coyotes showed themselves in the afternoon. The boys gave chase to the coyotes and fired several shots after them, but they escaped unharmed.

"They go faster than they seem to," laughed Dick, as the boys rode back. "I've

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the mountains and pitched camp. This time they braced the tent with poles, and Dick said it would take a cyclone to blow it down. The brook they had followed all day came down in a thundering cataract from snow-fields far above. At several places it plunged from precipices and dropped fifty feet or more to a rocky basin below. At other spots it flowed over great moss-covered terraces, until it took its final plunge and started on its long journey into some distant cañon.

"We are certainly at the headwaters now," laughed Ed.

"Yes, there's no danger of anything contaminating our water-supply," said Dick.

As they were about to sit down to supper, they saw a man walk toward their tent. He was alone and he came from the direction in which they had heard the shots.

"Here comes our unknown hunter," said Ed.

"I wonder who he is and what he wants?" asked George.

"We'll soon know who he is," said Dick, rising and going to the larder. "And I

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As the stranger came nearer they saw that he was a man well past the middle of life. He was dressed in buckskins, and he carried an old-fashioned rifle with a long barrel. His gait was the easy, swinging stride of the habitual woodsman, and almost before they realized it he was within hailing distance.

"Howdy, boys?" he said, coming to the fire.

"Howdy?" replied Dick, as he began a searching scrutiny of the stranger.

The latter slipped his pack to the ground and proceeded to make himself at home. They saw that he, too, was taking accurate account of their outfit and all its details. He accepted Dick's invitation to dine, quite as a matter of course, and took his own dining-kit from his pack. As yet he had not asked them their business, nor had Dick asked him his. The conversation centered about the storm of the night before and other local subjects. It seemed to the boys that Dick and the stranger were trying each other out

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While this was going on, Ed and George were studying the new-comer. He was a handsome man, perhaps sixty years old, with a splendid head of long, white hair, and a beard and mustache to match. He could have posed for the ideal type of Western scout, for his manner and dress proclaimed him one of the old-timers. There was a quiet dignity about him which gained their respect, and they believed him to be of the same caliber as Dick.

"Prospectin'?" he asked, finally, looking at Dick for the answer.

"No, not exactly," replied Dick. "We're just ambling toward the Lazy Y Ranch, and in the meantime we're taking some pictures and looking the country over."

The stranger nodded his head understandingly. Then he rose and went to his pack. He brought forth two splendid pelts and threw them on the ground. They had been taken from timber wolves, and the boys hastened over to examine them.

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"Up on that mountain yonder," and he pointed to where they had heard the shots.

"We heard you shoot," said Ed.

"Yes, I reckon you did. I saw you when you first came into the basin. I'd have looked you up last night, but I saw the storm comin' and I concluded to stay in the timber."

While they examined the wolf pelts he took a tiny shelter tent from his pack and stretched it between two trees. He threw his blankets beneath it, and then sat down by the fire and lighted his pipe.

"Well, let's get acquainted," he proposed. "My name is Jim Dowling; I'm from down Big Boulder way."

"I'm Dick Welles; I've got a cabin over near Cut-Off; and these are two friends of mine from the East, Ed Williams and George Rand."

They shook hands, and Dowling became one of the outfit.

"I suppose you are wondering what brought me into this country?" he said. "Well, I'm huntin' wolves for the bounty that's on them.

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ranchers got together and offered a bounty of twenty dollars for every wolf scalp brought in. As I didn't have anything better to do, I went into the business. Last winter I trapped and shot a good many, and this spring those that were left hiked over into this country, and I followed them. It's hard work rounding them up over here; but I'll put in the summer at it and see what I can do. They're wise to a trap, so I have to take a chance with the rifle now. How would you fellows like to try a hunt with me to-morrow? I think I can drive them out, and, by scattering, some of us will be pretty sure to get a shot."

Ed and George instantly accepted, and Dick said he would go with them. Dowling's plan was to surround the swamp in which he believed the wolves had their rendezvous; then he would beat the cover and endeavor to drive them to Dick and the boys. The plan seemed to be a good one, and the boys went to bed enthusiastic.

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they were to take along its border, and said he would wait until they were in their places. Dick led them down the mountain-side and placed them according to old Jim's instructions. Then he left them and went to his own stand.

The boys were about a mile from each other, and their vigil was a lonely one. A dense forest of evergreens began at the edge of the swamp, and it looked to be just the place for such game as they were after. Each in his appointed place, they sat with their rifles across their knees, and waited impatiently for a sign of the wolves or a signal from Jim. He had told them, if he succeeded in routing the wolves, he would signal with rifle-shots so that the watchers would know on what side to expect them. Two quick shots would put Dick on his guard, three would warn George to be on the watch, and four would advise Ed that they were coming his way. He told them to pay no attention to single shots with

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The boys wondered if Jim had entered the swamp, if he had found any sign of wolves, if he had mistaken the place of rendezvous, and if the wolves had sneaked out between the three guards along the border. Their nerves, which had been at a high tension when they took their stands, gradually relaxed and the job became tiresome. They began to wish that they had gone after mountain-sheep. Perhaps the veteran wolf-hunter had been over-confident.

George ceased to speculate when he heard the breaking of dry twigs off at one side. He cocked his rifle and rose to his feet, and the noise ceased. Alert and suspicious, the young hunter looked carefully about, endeavoring to catch a glimpse of the unseen prowler. He saw nothing. Still he felt that something was watching him. The feeling made him uneasy. He wondered if the wolves were really stalking him. The possibility was far from reassuring, and he sought to dismiss it. He resumed his seat and started to eat part of his lunch. The sun had disappeared and the

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and hurried toward the sound. A splendid white-tail buck snorted and bounded away, and the lad uncocked his rifle and laughed at his fears.

"I don't believe there are any wolves in the swamp, after all. That deer wouldn't be fooling so near it if there were," he said, aloud.

Then four shots sounded from the center of the swamp.

"They're coming to me!" cried Ed, springing excitedly to his feet.

Ed had taken his stand at the head of a little ravine which led into the swamp. It was a fairly open runway, and it seemed natural that the wolves should leave their hiding-place by that route. Dick had said it was a likely spot when he left him there. Ed put himself in position for an open shot and waited in suspense.

Suddenly three gray forms slunk from the shadows and discovered him. They halted for an instant, and Ed threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired. The leader fell and the others turned to slink away, and Ed fired twice more. Then he saw more gray shapes

were rather wild and he had two wounded wolves to fight. With savage snarls they turned and bounded toward him. The rest of the pack took courage at this and rushed from cover to reinforce their comrades.

Ed shot one of the wolves before it reached him; but the other one was upon him before he could fire. It jumped away as he swung a vicious blow at its head with his rifle-stock. There was no time to bring the rifle to shoulder for the next shot, and Ed killed the savage creature by shooting from his hip.

Somewhat awed, the rest of the pack had split about him, and he found himself surrounded. Placing his back to a tree, he fired each time a wolf passed an open space in the timber. But the crafty animals soon learned the danger of exposing themselves and withdrew from sight.

For some moments there was silence, but Ed knew he was watched and guarded. He felt sure an attempt to retreat would bring the entire pack upon him. A charge in force would end him. Afraid of inviting it, the

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trotting about him, looking for a weak spot in his defense. His greatest fear was that they would charge from all sides at once. If they should, he realized that he would be speedily torn to pieces.

There was a sound at his back, and, looking cautiously around the tree, Ed discovered a wolf in the act of sneaking upon him. He fired and the howling brute galloped off on three legs. Then he was compelled to wheel and fight off an attack from the front, for at sound of their comrade's distress the pack had again advanced. This time they were bolder, and Ed realized that every moment he was in greater danger. The howls and snarls of their wounded comrades and the smell of blood had worked the survivors into a state of frenzy. Ed began to count the cartridges still in his pocket. His supply was getting low. It was with difficulty that he drove the wolves to cover, and he dreaded to think what the outcome of their next assault might be. But that final assault never took place, for at that instant Dick and Jim appeared

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Ed joined them. Finding the tables turned upon them, the cowardly brutes endeavored to sneak away. But three pairs of keen eyes were watching for them, and each time one showed itself a rifle-ball usually dropped it in its tracks. When there were no more wolves to shoot at the hunters took count of their victims. Ed had four to his credit, Dick two, and Jim three.

"That's what I call a pretty good day's work," cried the wolf-hunter, enthusiastically. "My lad, you've made a neat little sum to-day, and, what's more, you've showed your nerve," he said, turning to Ed.

"Oh, not at all," declared Ed. "The bounty belongs to you. We were just in it for the sport. You found the wolves and you shall have the money. Don't you think so, Dick?"

"Sure thing."

"Well, that's sure mighty white of you fellows. But, say, I'll tell you what, after I've collected the bounty I'll send you the skins of those you killed."

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"That will be great!" said Ed. "I'd rather

at one another inquiringly. They were about to investigate, when George appeared with a large gray wolf over his shoulder.

"Better late than never," he laughed, as he dropped his trophy to the ground.

"Where did you come from and how did you get that fellow?" Dick asked, in surprise.

"Why, I heard such a tremendous racket over here that I feared Ed was being eaten up. I thought I'd come over and lend a hand. I got out of my course a little and found myself in the swamp. Finally I heard more shots, and just as I was blaming my luck for being late this old chap rose from behind a rock and growled at me. I saw at once that he was badly wounded, but he seemed anxious to fight, so I took him on and finished him."

On the way to camp Jim told how he had come upon the wolf pack deep in the swamp. He said they got away before he had a chance to shoot. They made such a noise that he

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VIII

MOUNTAIN-SHEEP

THE next morning Dowling returned to the mountains, and after he had gone they set out for the sheep country. The rifles were left in camp, but Dick buckled on his heavy Colt's revolver, and the boys took the camera. It was to be an expedition for pictures, and, as they had plenty of climbing before them, they decided to go light.

The first part of the ascent reminded them of the trip up Cut-Off, when they had shot the mountain-lion. For a half-hour or so they continued through a forest of tall evergreens. Elk trails were numerous, but the animals themselves remained out of sight.

After an hour's work they came to the usual series of open parks, and above them they

came to the snow-fields and were almost blinded by the reflected glare of the sun. At some places Dick was forced to cut footholds with his ax, and the boys were careful to step in his trail. Hot and tired, they paused for breath and looked down into Horseshoe Basin. Their tent showed a tiny speck of white in a square of green, and the horses looked like dots. Ed and George were higher than they had ever been before, and the steepest part of their climb was still above them. To look down made them dizzy. An avalanche of sliding snow roared down from a neighboring peak, and the boys shivered at the sound. Finally they reached bare ground and followed along the base of the rocky summit in search for a way to the top. Then they found fresh sheep tracks and everything else was forgotten.

The tracks went up an almost perpendicular incline, toward a rocky platform, and Dick crawled after them. The boys stood aghast

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bility of a drop of several hundred feet more at the end. It seemed like a big risk to take for a picture, and the boys hesitated.

"There's a nice trail up here, and it's all cut up with sheep tracks," said Dick, encouragingly.

That settled it. Ed took a deep breath and began to climb. He went very slowly, using hands as well as feet. Dick encouraged him from above and George warned him from below. He covered half the distance and stopped to rest. He dared not take his eyes from Dick, who was lying down, ready to grasp him when he came within reach. But, having stopped, it seemed impossible to start again. Some gravel rattled away from beneath him, and Ed believed he was sliding. He lost his nerve and could not move. He became faint, and the perspiration streamed down his face and arms.

"Come on. You're not going to sleep there, are you?" laughed Dick.

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"Whew! that was a peach!" he gasped. "Where's George?"

"He's coming," said Dick.

Encouraged by Ed's success, George made splendid progress. He did not stop as Ed had done, but kept climbing until he came within reach of the arms outstretched to help.

"Now, you fellows can rest here for a spell, and I'll climb up there where these tracks go and see if I can get sight of anything," said Dick.

They watched him wriggle upward until he came to the bare rock. Then he rose and disappeared around a projecting "chimney" from one of the pinnacles. A few moments later they heard a crash of loosened stones, and, looking in alarm, they saw Dick going to the very summit. He was flattened against the rocky wall, climbing by aid of his hands and feet. Inch by inch he made his way toward the top. It was a feat which required skill and strength, and the boys marveled at his agility. Finally he reached his goal and waved to them. Then he turned and

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"You bet. Look at that big bird flying about down there below us. How peculiarly it acts."

"It's an eagle, and it's after something. See it swoop at those rocks," cried Ed.

They threw themselves down and peered over the edge of the narrow platform. Some distance below them was another smaller shelf of rock, and on it were two mountain-sheep—a mother and her young. The eagle was attempting to steal the baby sheep.

"If only we had our rifles we'd soon put that winged pirate out of business," said George, threateningly.

But they were unarmed, and consequently powerless to help the courageous mother and her lamb. However, each time the ewe beat him off they chuckled. But the great bird was persistent, and it returned to the attack again and again.

At each assault the ewe crowded her baby against the wall of rock and exposed her own body to the attack. The boys saw the eagle strike her with its talons, and there was a

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came dangerously near the eagle's breast. One thrust would have ended the combat. But the eagle was experienced, and when the ewe lowered her head the crafty bird invariably checked itself and withdrew for a safer opening.

Ed got out the camera and snapped several pictures. Then, hoping to drive the eagle from its attack, they began to shout. But the noise had the wrong effect; it frightened the sheep and it turned to run. Instantly the eagle took advantage of the opening and swooped upon the unprotected lamb. But the mother wheeled and rushed so quickly that her horns filled the air with feathers. Realizing that their ill-timed interference had almost caused the tragedy which they wished to prevent, the boys remained silent.

Apparently mindful of its narrow escape, the eagle left its prey and began to tower into the air. The boys hoped it had withdrawn from the conflict. It began to scream, and they believed it had been sorely wounded in the last encounter.

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But they were mistaken, for the next in-

rific, and the ewe was felled to her knees. The watchers feared that her back had been broken, but she struggled gamely to her feet, and just as the eagle was about to sink its talons into the lamb the desperate mother charged. This time there was no escape. The eagle was caught before it could use its wings, and the infuriated ewe crushed it against the rocks. It dropped at her feet and made the best fight it could, but she jumped upon it and soon stamped it into a shapeless mass. Then, having caught the man-scent, the ewe bounded away, followed by her bleating baby.

The boys felt like applauding the hard-earned victory; but they realized that there might be other sheep in the vicinity, and they curbed their enthusiasm. In the mean time they had seen or heard nothing of Dick, and they wondered what had become of him.

"I guess we drew the reserved seats this time," laughed Ed. "I don't believe he has found anything."

While they were talking about him he re-

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"It's a great country up there," he said. "And I've located a nice bunch of sheep."

"Where?" demanded the boys.

"Over yonder on one of the slopes."

"Did they see you?" asked George, anxiously.

"No, I don't think so. But it 'll be no picnic to get to them."

In order to reach the sheep they must descend to timber-line and follow it around the "shoulder" of the mountain. Then they would come to a shallow ravine, or draw, which they must cross, and climb the other side to the slope where the sheep were grazing. He said there was little likelihood of the sheep moving away before they reached them.

Then the boys told him what they had seen. He was much interested in their description of the battle, and he said they had been unusually lucky. They made him lie down and peer over the edge of the platform to see the crushed body of the eagle.

"*It* doesn't generally end that way," he said, rising. "As a usual thing the eagle gets

until one of them passed away. They're sure savage."

In making his descent Dick chose a new course, and to the boys it seemed to be even steeper than the way they had come. More than once they pivoted on the edge of precipices that made them catch their breath. But while it was equally dangerous, the descent was not as exhausting as the climb, and by following Dick's instructions the lads soon found themselves safe in the timber. They came to a pretty little mountain torrent and sat down for a hurried lunch. Then they hastened on to make up the lost time.

When they at last came to the ravine Ed brought out the binoculars and made a sweeping survey of the opposite slope. He failed to discover the sheep, and expressed his disappointment. Then George took the glasses, and he, too, made a careful survey, but with no better result.

"Don't worry, boys; they're not far away

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grassy slope just above timber-line, their favorite resort in summer.

It was the same hard work all over again, and the boys began to understand why the head of a mountain-ram is considered the prize trophy in a sportsman's collection. They were experiencing most of the hardships and some of the dangers through which the successful sheep-hunter must pass. But they had also caught his enthusiasm, and they planned to go him one better. They determined to stalk and photograph a mountain-ram in its native haunts.

They toiled up to the limit of trees, and then they made another reconnaissance with the glasses. This time they saw the sheep. There were six in the band, a ram, three ewes, and two lambs. They had finished grazing and had climbed to a narrow shelf for their customary siesta. The ram showed to splendid advantage through the binoculars, and the boys stared longingly at his great horns.

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plain sight, would have invited failure. And to alarm them was to lose them, for, once startled, they would flee to some inaccessible peak and the day's work would go for nothing. How could they be brought within range of the camera? The boys asked Dick this question, and he shook his head.

"They're sure in a bad place for that," he said, after he had studied their position for a few moments.

"But, after all this work, we surely can't give them up," declared Ed, pleadingly.

"Who said anything about giving them up?" asked Dick, quietly. "You say you wish to get near enough to take a picture; I'm trying to figure out a way to do it."

This gentle rebuke had its effect, and the boys sat down to await his orders. For some minutes Dick continued to search for a course which would gain them their object. His trained eyes found and examined every seam, crevice, and draw on the mountain-side. At last he planned a route which would bring

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crawling among them the boys could take the desired picture.

"Follow close behind me," he said, "and do as I do. Whenever you're in sight of the sheep keep your eyes on them, and if they rise, or act uneasy, make a pancake of yourself."

What they had done before was simple compared with what they were compelled to do now. Dick climbed from rock to rock, crawled across slides, pulled himself to narrow ledges, and bridged twenty-foot gaps on mere footholds. But each daring attempt brought him nearer the sheep, and the lads clenched their teeth and followed. Most of the time they were out of sight of the game, through Dick's careful selection of the route. At last they approached the boulders, and Dick stopped and bade them go forward alone.

"You'll see them from there," he said. "Be sure to have your camera ready, and don't forget to snap a picture of the ram when he turns to face you. Take your time and don't start ahead until you know where you intend to stop."

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The boys chose a course which would take

slowly and carefully, and were rewarded by seeing the sheep close at hand. The ram was on his feet, and the boys were afraid to move lest they should attract his attention.

"What a beauty!" whispered George.

"'Sh!" cautioned Ed.

The ram had his head turned from them, and they noted the cream-yellow patch on his hind-quarters. He was in a poor position for a picture, and the boys determined to venture nearer. But one of the ewes faced them, and to escape notice their advance had to be made with great caution. Now that they were almost within focusing range, they were afraid of blundering and spoiling their opportunity. They crawled forward a few inches at a time and concealed themselves behind every available boulder. They trembled with anxiety, and their hearts beat fast with excitement. Should they succeed, the picture would be priceless; should they fail, the disappointment would be overwhelming.

A ewe rose to her feet, and a lamb rose with her; then the rest of the band rose. The

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glass. The ram turned and looked in their direction, then he took a few steps toward them, and the ewes and lambs crowded close behind him. The whole band showed distinctly through the lens, and Ed released the shutter.

The next instant the sheep were in flight. Ed jumped to his feet and tried to get another exposure, but they were out of range before he was ready. The boys looked after them in silent admiration as they bounded away toward higher ground. The ram chose the route, and his little flock followed him. The lambs ran close at their mothers' heels, and the ewes moderated their pace to accommodate their babies. In less than a minute the entire band had galloped from sight.

"George, I wouldn't take a hundred dollars for that negative," declared Ed.

"It would probably cost you much more than that to get another one," laughed Dick, as he came forward to offer congratulations.

They returned to Horseshoe Basin, well satisfied with the result of the day's toil.

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IX

BURNED OUT

THEY stayed in the basin three days longer, to photograph elk and deer. Then they broke camp and started for the cabin of Dick's friend, the ranger. It was situated in the Forest Reserve. To reach it they had to cross the mountains to the west of Horseshoe Basin. The old wolf-hunter had told of a trail which would take them over the divide. They followed it, and after a half-day's toil it brought them to the rim of a "box" cañon. It was necessary to cross this cañon, but the trail seemed to go no farther.

"Surely there must be a way down into the cañon," said Dick.

At this suggestion they separated and went in opposite directions, searching for a trail

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their course, for they knew he had found the other end of the trail.

"Here it is," he said, as they brought up the horses.

It was steep and narrow and dangerous. The moment the boys saw it they had serious doubts about old Vixen.

"Don't you worry about her," laughed Dick when they expressed their fears. "She's too wise to attempt any foolishness on this kind of a trail."

Then he rode Buck over the rim, and, as if to show her appreciation of his praise, the balky old mare instantly followed him. The other pack-horses went after her, and Vic and Skeets brought up the rear.

"Give them a loose rein and lie back at the steep places," cautioned Dick, as Buck pivoted around a projecting corner.

To keep from scraping their packs, Vixen and her companions were compelled to walk on the outside edge of the narrow trail. The rock seemed to crumble away from beneath their hoofs, and the boys expected at any moment to see them fall to their deaths. But

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ing by the skill with which they negotiated the difficult trail. Vixen went along as carefully and sedately as an old cow, and the other horses followed in her footsteps. However, the whole descent was a nerve-trying ordeal, and Ed and George were much relieved when they finally reached the bed of the cañon.

As in the others, a narrow brook flowed through the center of it. But there the similarity ended. In place of the wide, field-like parks of Catamount Cañon and the splendid green valley in Horseshoe Basin, they found themselves in a narrow, rocky defile between two towering walls of rock, upon which grew nothing but some parched lichens. The boys missed the trees, the birds, and the sunlight, for the place they had entered seemed to be in perpetual shadow. It was so confined and its walls were so high that Ed and George felt as if they had dropped through a crack in the earth and had landed at the

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my cabin, and then I keep to the mountains and circle around the head of Catamount Cañon. But I don't believe we'll be in here very much longer," said Dick, hopefully.

The little trail continued along beside the water, and, thinking that it would soon bring them into the open, they followed it. They rode until long past noon, and, as they saw no sign of the cañon ending, they halted for the midday meal.

Then they resumed the journey, and before they had gone a thousand yards they found the place where the trail climbed out. They followed it to the top and entered a wide plateau. Below them an unbroken wilderness extended for miles, and Dick said it was the Forest Reserve. They turned from the cañon rim and took their way down to a little park, and there they made camp.

Early the next morning they descended the mountain and entered the fragrant forest of lodge-pole pines. It was good to be in the woods again, and the boys thought of Maine. Having left the barren cañon and the bleak

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Dick called "pine-crows," followed them for a quarter of a mile or more; a marten flashed up the side of a tree; and at the edge of a swale they routed out a doe and her fawn.

Later in the day they found a well-blazed trail which Dick thought led to the ranger's headquarters, so they decided to follow it. At the end of an hour it brought them to a stream and, close beside it, a tiny cabin. Dick shouted to announce their approach, but no one responded.

"Probably John is off on a scout," said Dick, as he dismounted and read a notice on the door.

> WORKING ON BRIDGE
> AT BIG FORKS.
>
> JOHN GRANT.

"Well, we'll just naturally unload the outfit, turn the horses into the corral, and make

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ly. One bunk, a small stove rusted through in several places, a log bench, and a box cupboard completed the interior "decorations." In the cooking department were some rusty knives, forks, and spoons, and a battered tin cup, a pancake-turner, an iron griddle, and a coffee-pot without a handle. The available food-supply consisted of two hams suspended from the roof-poles, some flour and cornmeal, a strip of bacon, and several packages of oatmeal. A pail and a basin were behind the door, and a dipper hung from a peg above them.

The boys unpacked the outfit and carried the food-supply inside, while Dick almost smothered himself endeavoring to start a fire in the leaky stove. It oozed smoke at every crack, and Dick and the lads were obliged to retreat outdoors until the wood was well kindled.

"Great thing for a cold in the head," laughed Dick, as he wiped his eyes.

"I wonder what your friend will think

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They put up their tent, for they realized that the cabin was too small to accommodate them. Then, as Dick prepared supper, the boys went in search of pasturage. They found a good-sized park, and returned and drove the horses into it. They were careful to fasten the bell-strap about Vixen's neck, as they had no desire to spend the following day hunting her.

As the boys were about to leave them the horses raised their heads and looked toward the other side of the park. Then Vixen whinnied and started forward. A moment later a horseman rode into view, leading a pack-animal behind him.

"It must be John Grant, the ranger," said Ed.

The rider stopped, looking at the brand on Vixen's flank, and then came directly toward them. He was young and dark, and had the physique of an athlete. His attire was picturesque and serviceable—a yellow kerchief knotted loosely about his neck, the olive-drab shirt and riding breeches of the forestry

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holster from which showed the butt of a Colt's .44.

"Howdy, boys," he said, pleasantly. "Putting up at the shack?"

"Yes, we are with Dick Welles," explained Ed.

"Well, I'll sure be glad to see Dick, and I'm glad to know you. My name is John Grant."

Dick had prepared supper entirely from their own supply of provisions, and Grant declared the meal a great treat. He excused his scant larder, and said he had been too busy to go out for a new supply of "grub."

The boys were much interested in his field outfit, which consisted of a small shelter tent, of about four pounds' weight, a home-made sleeping-bag of tarpaulin and blankets, a rubber poncho, a fry-pan, a meal-tin, and a coffee-pot, and a table kit containing knife, fork, spoon, and cup. The cooking-utensils and the food supply were carried in two cow-hide panniers, one on each side of the pack-

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hours between supper and bedtime passed quickly and pleasantly. Dick and the ranger told stories, and the boys listened attentively. It was time to retire before they realized it, and they bade Grant good night and went to the tent.

Dick awakened them at daylight, and he seemed so serious that they believed something was wrong. They hurried outside, and the truth instantly flashed into their minds. The forest was flooded with a drifting blue haze and the air was tainted with the odor of smoke. Ed and George looked at each other in alarm, for they realized that they were in the path of an approaching forest fire. They had passed through a similar experience at Old Ben's cabin in Maine, and they knew what was before them. The corral bars were down, and they believed that Dick had gone for the horses. A moment later old Vixen came out of the woods and tried to sneak past, but the boys heard Dick's shout, and they headed her off and drove her into

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one coming, and I thought we'd better pen the horses before they stampede."

"How far away is it?" asked George.

"I can't tell you until John comes back. He went to the top of the mountain to look around. We'll go up there after we've had breakfast."

While they were eating the ranger returned. He seemed to be troubled and anxious, and they feared the fire was a serious one.

"It's coming up the other side of Long Ridge, and it's a hummer," he said. "We'll have just about all we can do to beat it to the river."

The boys were dumfounded at the idea of abandoning the cabin to the flames. They had supposed they were to stay and make a fight for it. But Dick speedily disillusioned their minds. He said a fire like the one which was bearing down upon them would send out heat enough to shrivel them to cinders.

"It's not undergrowth, it's timber that burns out here. Each tree becomes a flaming

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The wind had freshened, and a heavy gray smoke-pall settled in the woods. The horses became restive, and Dick and the ranger hurried with the packs. Everything but the stove was removed from the cabin. Then they closed the door and left the little shack to its fate.

"We'll stick to the trail as long as we can," cried Grant, as he mounted into his saddle.

They went away at a canter, and it required no urging to keep the pack-animals to the pace. They snorted and crowded close upon one another's heels, as though they fully understood the danger that threatened. But before they had gone far the trail became rough and obstructed and they were obliged to slow down to a walk. They felt that they were losing valuable minutes, and the horses and their riders grew impatient and nervous.

"Take your time; we'll strike a better piece in a few minutes," cried Grant, encouragingly.

Then they came to a small park, and the horses galloped wildly across it. It took con-

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in great yellow clouds. A small band of elk ran past the refugees; they, too, were fleeing from the fire. They found a better bit of trail on the other side of the park, and the horses took advantage of it. It was almost impossible to see them through the smoke, and the boys sat close in their saddles and left everything to their ponies.

"We'll have to leave it here," they heard Grant shout from somewhere on the right. "This way, and ride like thunder. She's coming fast."

Then they heard Vixen, or one of the other horses, crash into a tree and fall. Vic and Skeets bounded past the struggling beast, and Ed was almost knocked from his saddle by a low, spreading branch. They had lost sight of their companions, for they could not see five feet ahead. But Grant and Dick continued to shout, and the boys did their best to follow the sounds. The smoke increased, and they knew that the fire was rapidly overtaking them. They had no idea how far it was to the river, or in what direction to seek it. Their one thought was to keep within

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and they made no attempt to guide them. They lost all sense of direction, for it was like running through a fog. They gasped for breath and wiped the tears from their eyes. They were scraped against tree-trunks and scratched by branches, but they managed to stay in the saddle. They wondered if Grant was following a trail, or striking at random through the woods.

"How much farther?" yelled George.

"Don't know," cried Ed."

"Come on!" shouted Dick.

They seemed to have reached a declivity, and the ponies slowed to a walk. They began to slip and plunge, and the boys wondered if they were on a slide. For the first time they heard the roar of the fire behind them. It sounded like distant thunder, and, unable to restrain the impulse, they began to urge their mounts. They heard the rattle of loose gravel and the dull thud of bounding stones. Vic went to his knees and Ed barely escaped a "header." The other horses were sliding along beside them. If there were trees they

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They listened anxiously for the noise of its waters; but that ominous roar behind them drove all other sounds from their ears. Each moment the smoke became thicker, and they gasped for breath. The wind brought the fire on at great speed, and the boys knew that it was only a question of minutes before they would be overtaken. Then they felt the heat —the fire was at their heels!

Frenzied with fear, the ponies raced wildly down the incline. The boys lost each other and the pack-train. They were blinded and bewildered. Each gripped the pommel of his saddle and set his feet for the shock he felt sure must come. They knew that the river was somewhere below them. How far below or what obstacles intervened they had no idea. The ponies seemed to be bounding through space. The boys were strangling, their senses were leaving them, a red mist obscured their vision. They began to sway in their saddles. Then they reached the river.

The ponies waded into the icy water and swam to the opposite shore. Revived and

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themselves on a narrow beach, and behind it was the forest. The air there was much clearer, and by dismounting and bathing their eyes they were able to see. While Ed was crouched at the water Dick rode up behind him.

"Well, you're sure a sight for my aching eyes," he said. "But where is George?"

"I don't know; he rode part way down that slide, or whatever it was that we came down, and then the fire overtook us and we became separated. He must have reached the river, and if he did he's probably safe," said Ed, as if to convince himself.

Dick remained silent.

"You don't suppose—" began Ed; but he dared not utter the fear that was in his mind.

The fire roared on the other side of the river. They saw its dull glare through the great banks of smoke that rolled out over the water. There it would stop—beaten. They realized how close their escape had been. But how about the others?

"Where's Grant?" asked Ed.

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into view. They brought three pack-horses, the ranger's and two of Dick's.

"We thought you fellows had been burned up," said Grant.

"And we had come to the same conclusion about you," replied Ed, as he held a wet handkerchief to his eyes.

"We found old Vixen tied to a tree farther down the beach, and we knew that one of you was safe. Say, it was a ride and a half. I found one of the pack-horses swimming beside me, and I picked up the other one on this side. It must be the one that fell, for it's badly scraped on one of its flanks," said George.

They watched the fire sweep to the river, and then the smoke drove them into the woods. They found all but one of the packs intact, although most of their contents were drenched. Grant said there was no danger of the fire crossing the water, as the sparks and cinders were cold before they reached

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X

WITH THE COWBOYS

A TWO-DAYS' journey over the plains brought them to the Lazy Y Ranch. It was prettily situated within the shadow of a range of white-capped peaks. The low, rambling ranch-house nestled cosily in a grove of willows, and at the foot of the eminence on which it stood was an attractive little artificial lake. It had been made by stretching a dam across the brook that furnished water to the stock-pens. The outbuildings were grouped together at a respectful distance from the owner's dwelling, and beyond them were the corrals.

"It's a nice lay-out, isn't it?" said Dick.

"Beautiful," agreed Ed.

Their approach was heralded by a pack of hounds, which barked savagely and bounded toward them. A man ran from one of the

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"Those dogs are not as savage as they seem. We'll have some great sport with them before we leave. They're the greatest hunting-pack in the state," said Dick.

"What do they hunt?" inquired Ed, aroused at the possibilities.

"Coyotes and mountain-lions."

"That's us!" cried George.

They had come to a set of bars, and Dick dismounted and lowered them. When the horses had passed through he put them in place and resumed his position at the head of the outfit. A winding lane took them over a bridge and brought them to the first of the ranch buildings. The man who had been watching them came forward, surrounded by the dogs. He was a thin, wiry little man, with shoulders stooped from toil and legs bowed from riding. He wore a faded flannel shirt, a vest (unbuttoned because it was well-nigh buttonless), corduroy trousers, and well-worn cow-man's boots. He "sized up" the strangers with a penetrating glance of his

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"I reckon you'll find him up at headquarters." And he jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the ranch-house. "If you've a mind to, you can turn your pack-animals into the corral here."

At that moment the dogs pushed their investigations too far, and Skeets lashed out viciously with his hind feet. One of the hounds was bowled over and pandemonium instantly broke loose. Incensed at the treatment of their comrade, the pack made a combined attack on the bronco, and Vic, unwilling to see Skeets get the worst of it, immediately entered the fray.

Bucking, plunging, and kicking, the two ponies threatened to annihilate the entire pack. Ed and George did their best to stop hostilities, but they were greatly handicapped by the antics of the ponies and were forced to use their best efforts to keep themselves in the saddle. However, the dogs were finally driven off by the man on the ground, and apologies were offered by both sides.

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When the pack-horses had been driven into

to meet them. No doubt he had been roused by the sounds of battle.

"There's Bob Armstrong, now," said Dick, when he caught sight of him.

A moment later the men were shaking hands.

"Bob, I want you to meet two young friends of mine from the East, Ed Williams and George Rand. They're out here for their vacation, and I want them to see a real ranch."

"Boys, you're sure welcome, and we'll try to entertain you as long as you'll stay," said the ranch-owner.

It was a man's ranch, for Bob Armstrong was an old bachelor; his housekeeper was Ching Foy, a Chinaman. Armstrong went back to the corrals with them, and they unpacked their outfit and turned the horses loose.

"Just take your duffle into the storehouse; you'll not require it while you're with me," he assured them.

He insisted that they should carry their personal belongings to the ranch-house, although Dick said they could just as well

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able. The boys had a room to themselves, and Dick a room adjoining. After they had washed they followed their host to the veranda which extended across the front of the house.

"Some of the boys will be in soon; this is mail day, and a few of them expect letters. I've got to move a thousand steers to the Twin Circle Ranch, and the outfit is on the range rounding them up and cutting them out," Armstrong told them.

Just at sunset the expected cowboys galloped up to the ranch. There were twelve of them, and they were a hardy-looking crowd. Several wore white angora-skin "chaps"; others wore the more conventional corduroys; but all of them wore high-heeled boots, gay kerchiefs, and old, flappy-brimmed sombreros. Their ponies were of all sorts and sizes. There were piebalds, roans, buckskins, calicos, and all of the standard types known to cattlemen. They were wild-eyed, restless, and wiry. It was an imposing cavalcade of dust-stained veterans, and the boys instantly became interested.

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He was a clean-cut young fellow about thirty years old. The boys liked him at once, for he measured up to their ideal of all that a cowboy should be. He spoke with a quaint drawl which delighted them, and they were sorry when he returned to the bunk-house. However, Armstrong arranged for the boys to accompany Tad and his men the following day, and Ed and George went to bed well satisfied with their prospects for a good time.

It was barely daylight when they heard a tap at their window. Ed rose and went to investigate.

"Time to roll out, pard," said Tad, in a low voice. "Come down to the bunk-house and we'll fix you up with breakfast."

The boys hurried into their clothes and sneaked quietly from the house. They saw smoke rising from one of the outbuildings, and they headed for it. The door was open, and a jolly company of coatless men sat about the table.

"Come in, boys," said Tad.

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PREPARING TO "CINCH UP" AN OUTLAW

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shrewd men of the plains. It was a necessary ordeal through which every stranger had to pass before he was taken into comradeship, and the boys bore it patiently. They took chairs beside Tad, and in a few moments the conversation and jests were resumed. There was no direct introduction, but they soon learned the more familiar names of their new companions. They heard "Shorty" ask Pete for sugar; they found out that the cook's name was Tom; Tad addressed the long, thin individual on their right as "Skinny"; and it needed no great stretch of the imagination to connect a fiery-topped puncher with the appellation "Red." Thus their acquaintanceship widened, until by the time the meal was over they knew every man at the table.

When breakfast was finished the cowboys went to the corral for their horses, and Ed and George went for Vic and Skeets. While they were cinching the saddles Tad rode up and handed them two coiled lariats.

"Tie these ropes to the front of your saddles, and later on I'll show you how to swing them." he said. "Come out and see the

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cheers, and a moment afterward "Skinny" Flanders shot into view, closely followed by his enthusiastic comrades. He was mounted upon a coal-black mustang that was doing his best to unseat him. Rearing, pitching, and bucking, the infuriated beast tried to dispose of the man on his back. But in spite of his best efforts the lanky cowboy remained in the saddle.

Then, in sheer exasperation, the handsome black outlaw bolted for the open plain. "Skinny" yelled and waved his hat in challenge, and the entire cavalcade started in pursuit of him. It was a wild scramble, and Vic and Skeets took the boys into the thick of it. Down the lane, over the bridge, and up to the bars raced the black mustang. He gathered his powerful legs beneath him and sprang into the air. A full foot of daylight showed between his hoofs and the top rail, and his pursuers cheered enthusiastically.

"That brute is all horse," cried Tad, admiringly, as his white-nosed buckskin ran beside the boys.

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next one struck it and fell to its knees, but the rider never budged from the saddle. With the top bar out of the way the others made the jump without difficulty. It was a new experience for Ed and George, and they enjoyed it immensely.

"That outlaw horse will run until he's plumb winded, and we'll just pull up and let him go it," said Tad, after the chase had gone on for some time longer.

Tad told the boys that he and his men were rounding up scattered bunches of cattle and driving them to the main herd. He said after they had found all the "strays" they would divide the big bunch and cut out a thousand steers. These would be driven to Armstrong's other ranch for shipping. The foreman thought he would probably go with this great trail herd, and he said if he did the boys might accompany him. Ed and George, delighted at the prospect, determined to prolong their stay at the ranch until this big drive came off.

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boy was stretched upon the ground beside it, enjoying a cigarette. A short distance from him was a small bunch of cattle. As the riders approached the animals raised their heads and regarded them curiously.

"Is that 'locoed' skate of yours played out?" Tad inquired, jokingly, as they rode up to "Skinny."

"Played out nothin'," replied "Skinny," glancing up scornfully. "It's plumb tiresome travelin' in such slow company, so Satan and I stopped and had a nap while you were snailin' up to us."

"It looked a powerful lot like a runaway, to me," declared "Red" Saunders.

"Which remark I'll put down to jealousy," said "Skinny," with pretended disdain.

"Boys, I've got it," said "Arizona Pete," as a mischievous twinkle showed in his eyes.

"Let's hear it," urged his hilarious companions.

"Why, that ornery black horse is plumb

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silent for several moments while he eyed Saunders of the scarlet hair. Then he found his answer and rose to make it impressive.

"If you all are real curious to know what happened, I'll allow to tell you," said "Skinny," grinning.

"That's right, tell us," chorused the expectant punchers.

"You won't none of you get mad, will you?" inquired "Skinny," with his eyes on Saunders.

"No; go on," urged his inquisitive audience.

"You won't none of you take it as personal, will you?" persisted "Skinny," still looking innocently at his victim.

"No, no; go ahead, 'Skinny,'" they encouraged him.

"Well, boys, Satan looked around and saw 'Red' comin' up behind him, and then he just naturally lit out to vamoose from the fire," drawled "Skinny," without a trace of a smile.

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"Come, boys, let's get down to business," cried Tad, taking advantage of the moment. "'Skinny,' I'll leave you and 'Red' to bring in this bunch. 'Arizona,' you and Jake work the foothills, and the rest of us will scatter out along the bottoms."

The outfit divided to follow his instructions, and the boys soon found themselves alone with Tad. They saw "Red" and "Skinny" rounding up the herd; "Arizona" and Jake galloping toward the distant wooded slopes; and several other riders cantering along the open plain. Then they saw something else, and Tad also saw it.

"It looks like there's a critter mired over yonder," he said, as he galloped toward an animal which appeared to be struggling desperately.

The boys hurried after him, and as they drew nearer they saw that a gaunt red-and-white cow was knee-deep in a bog-hole. Tad was careful to stop at the edge of solid ground,

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in the bog-hole some hours. That she had struggled furiously was evident from her condition. Her eyes were wild and bulging, her breathing was rapid and noisy, and her flanks quivered convulsively. At their near approach the frenzied creature began her struggles anew, but with all her exertions she only sank deeper.

"I shouldn't wonder but that her calf is somewhere at the bottom of that mess," said Tad, soberly. "Take it easy, old girl; we'll pull you out if you'll give us a chance," he added, as the imprisoned brute continued her efforts.

He swung his lariat and shot the loop over her horns. Instantly he pulled it tight and took a hitch about his saddle-horn. Then he cleared his left leg from beneath the rope and started his pony. The rope tightened to the breaking-point, the pony fell to its knees, but still the cow stuck.

"I reckon I'll have to ask you fellows to help me," he said to the boys. "You see how it's to be done. Here, let me show you

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it above the head. Then he returned the rope and, after several attempts, Ed succeeded in dropping the loop over the cow's horns. George, too, finally accomplished the feat. Then, at Tad's word of command, the three ponies were started at the same time. They knew what was expected of them, and they pulled valiantly. The cow was dragged forward to firm footing, and once she found it she lost little time in scrambling to solid ground. For a moment she stood regarding her rescuers, and then, as Tad called a warning, she lowered her head and charged Ed and his pony.

"Throw off your rope!" cried the cowboy.

Ed cast the rope from the horn of his saddle, and Vic jumped nimbly aside as the excited cow rushed by him. Acting under Tad's orders, George had meantime freed Skeets from the cow by dropping his rope.

Then Tad took a hand. He brought his pony to its haunches and the cow came to the end of the rope and went down with a crash. At the same time the cowboy jumped

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During the whole operation his pony had remained with its front legs braced, while it maintained a constant strain upon the lariat and prevented the cow from either rising or tossing its head. Not until Tad had freed his rope did the clever little beast relax its vigilance.

"Ride out of the way and I'll let her up," Tad cautioned.

When the boys had obeyed his instructions, he called his pony to him and freed his captive. Then he sprang into his saddle and turned his mount to one side, as the surprised cow rose awkwardly to her feet. She regarded him sullenly for a moment, and then seemed to realize that she had had enough. She began to bawl and walk toward the boghole, but Tad intercepted her and drove her back.

"She has lost her calf in there, all right," he declared. "That is why she acted so mean. I've seen the same thing happen often. We'll just naturally drive her along

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so farther on they found another bunch of "strays," and their lone prisoner ran forward to join them. The boys helped Tad round them up, and then, as they had come to the end of their patrol, the cowboy turned his cattle toward the main herd.

Two hours' ride, for they were obliged to go slowly on account of the cattle, brought them to the scene of the round-up. Everywhere they looked the boys saw bunches of bawling cattle. The main herd was gathered into a great square, and about it rode alert horsemen, ready to drive back all deserters. Smaller herds were scattered on all sides, each watched over by two or more riders. Then, too, circle riders like themselves, were bringing in "strays," and the picture was one of bustling activity. At one side, in the shade of the cottonwoods, was the mess-wagon, and about it were a score or more of hungry cowboys sitting cross-legged on the ground. Tad gave his cattle into the care of the day herd-

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BRANDING A MAVERICK

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First he took them to an improvised rope corral, where a group of dusty, perspiring men were branding calves and mavericks. The foreman explained that a maverick is any unbranded animal above the calf age. They saw calves dragged close to a small fire from which the brander took a sizzling-hot iron and burned the distinguishing mark deep into the quivering flesh of the helpless victim. The calves struggled and bawled piteously, and the boys had much sympathy for them.

"It doesn't hurt long," Tad assured them.

Then they saw a maverick bull, a two-year-old that had somehow escaped the iron, driven within the fatal circle. He lowered his head and prepared to fight, but before he really got started two riders rode up and roped him, one by the head, the other by the hind feet, and in a twinkling he was stretched helpless upon the ground. But when he regained his liberty he retaliated by charging the entire group, horses, calves, and men, and the boys laughed heartily at the wild

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boys urged their ponies in and out between the close-packed beasts, and when they discovered an unbranded maverick or a calf they forced it toward the outside of the herd. Their ponies seemed to understand the game thoroughly, and once they were started after a particular animal they never left it until they brought it to the open. Then it was taken in charge by other riders, who roped it and brought it to the branders.

The boys spent the balance of the day on the range, and later Tad accompanied them to the ranch. He said the cowboys would stay on the range until the big drive was started. Then some would take up a weary vigil in "line camps," and the others would go with the drive or come in to help at the ranch.

It was quite dark by the time they came in sight of the house, and the boys were thoroughly tired from their long day in the saddle. They found Dick waiting for them at the corral.

"Well, how did you enjoy yourselves?" he

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XI

FOLLOWING THE HUNTING-PACK

"HOW would you fellows enjoy a run behind the dogs to-day?" asked Armstrong, at breakfast.

There was nothing the boys would like better.

"All right; we'll see if we can rout out a coyote or two. They have been unusually bold and troublesome this season, and I reckon it's time to get after them."

Armstrong and Dick had discovered a small band of them skulking about the horse corrals the day before. He believed they were waiting for a chance at the colts, and he determined to drive them from the ranch.

While they were saddling the horses Armstrong made known the individual merits of

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hound that stood with his front paws against his master's chest. "This is old Roarer; we named him that because of his voice. He sure makes music when the scent is hot."

Every dog in the pack was famous, and each was noted for his particular specialty. The boys learned that Roarer was a lion dog, and that he ran coyotes as a diversion; that Scuff, who had started the trouble with Skeets the day they arrived, was the fighter; that Flash, who looked like a greyhound, was the fastest dog in the country; that Queenie had the best nose for a "cold" scent; that Bruiser was the strategist; that Sport was an inveterate badger-killer, and so on through the list of battle-scarred heroes.

When the inspection was finished the horsemen cantered away toward the open plain. Armstrong rode ahead, and the dogs galloped close beside him. They were perfectly trained, and he controlled them with his voice. Roarer and Flash were impatient and eager, and they made several attempts to "jump the pack"

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coyotes, and more than once their eagerness caused them to mistake distant boulders for the animals they sought.

Finally they saw a coyote. For a moment or two it watched them from the top of a knoll, and then it turned and ran from sight. Armstrong rode after it, yelling at the top of his voice, and the pursuit began. The dogs raced away, baying fiercely, with old Roarer leading the chorus. But the coyote had a good start, and the chase promised to be a long one. When the riders topped the rise they saw the "wolf" running toward a distant grove of cottonwoods. The dogs were gaining, and the hunters shouted encouragement.

"Talk about steeplechasing," laughed Ed, as he and George raced along together.

"Come on, let's see what those ponies can do," challenged Dick, as Buck bounded past them.

Unwilling to be left behind, the boys loosened their bridle-reins, and Vic and Skeets responded with a sprint. Then the coyote

to overtake them and the race became a hot one.

"Don't let him catch us," cried Ed.

"Not without a run for it," replied George.

The dogs had cut the coyote's lead in half, but there they stopped. It seemed impossible to get nearer. The "wolf" appeared to be running easily, and the boys saw it occasionally look back over its shoulder at its pursuers. They saw, too, that Vic and Skeets were easily holding the pace, and they hoped to be "in at the death."

Then they came to a stretch of rough ground which was strewn with boulders and dotted with badger-holes. The ponies raced through it at top speed, but the boys had no time to think of their danger. Quick-footed and keen-eyed, the clever little beasts avoided the obstructions and pitfalls, and their riders made no attempt to check them. An exhilarating recklessness had taken possession of the boys, and their one idea was to keep close to the noisy pack in front of them.

Leaving this rough ground, the coyote again veered from its course and made for a dry

Then the pack began to disintegrate; the faster dogs were making it too hot not only for the "wolf," but for some of their heavier comrades as well. Flash was several lengths ahead of them all; then came Queenie and Sport, running nose and nose; Scuff was close behind them; and then came the balance of the pack, with old Roarer baying furiously a yard behind the others.

By the time the boys reached the coulée, Dick and Armstrong were up with them and the coyote and the hounds had crossed the dry brook-bed and climbed the opposite bank. The four horses slid to the bottom together. They rattled across the bed of loose gravel and scrambled to the plain on the other side.

"You thought you'd lose us, did you?" laughed Dick, as they resumed the chase.

"Come on!" shouted Armstrong. "They have got him!"

Flash had overtaken the coyote and was snapping at its hind-quarters. The "wolf" turned to fight him off, and he threw himself upon it. But it was more than a match for

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cue. Finding itself outnumbered, the coyote turned to run, but there was no chance for escape. It went down fighting valiantly, and the boys saw Roarer and Scuff close a death grip on its throat.

Then Armstrong rushed among them and lashed about him with his riding-quirt. The dogs would have torn the carcass to pieces, but he lifted it above their reach. He cut off the bushy tail and presented it to the boys; then he permitted the dogs to complete their work. But when they saw that their victim was dead they took no further interest in it.

"Well, that fellow won't trouble us any more," said the ranchman, with evident satisfaction.

While they were resting, Sport wandered away and found a badger. He attacked it at once and probably would have killed it, but it was near its hole, and stood him off long enough to reach safety. Sport sat on his haunches and expressed his feelings in a long,

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heat became intense and the dogs grew listless and indifferent. The riders turned their horses toward a grove of cottonwoods, and when they reached them they found a waterhole, so they dismounted and ate lunch.

As they lolled in the shade Queenie began to work out some sort of trail. She quartered to and fro with her nose close to the ground and became greatly excited.

"Something has been along here," declared the ranchman as he studied the actions of his hound.

"Maybe it's a jack-rabbit," suggested Dick.

"There's not a dog in the pack that would bother with a jack," declared Armstrong. "I broke them of that fool trick long ago."

Queenie seemed to be making progress, for she had left the cottonwoods and was following the trail into the open. She had roused several of her companions into curiosity, and Scuff and Sport began to investigate her find. Then the others became interested, and in a few moments the entire pack was working on the scent.

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He and Dick examined the ground, but it was sun-baked and they could learn nothing. In the meantime Queenie seemed to have lost the trail, and she whined impatiently and returned to her starting-point. Roarer continued to range in the open, but the rest of the pack gave it up as hopeless.

"I reckon it's quite old," said the ranchman.

Then Roarer began to bay, and he raced away with the yelping pack at his heels. There was a wild scramble for the horses; but by the time they had been bridled and saddled the dogs were a long distance away. They were baying merrily, and the sound made the boys' blood tingle.

"It's a lion as sure as you're born," cried Armstrong as he sprang into the saddle.

They raced away at a mad gallop, for the horses seemed to be as eager as their riders. But the pack was so far in advance that an attempt to overtake them would have been useless. After the first excited sprint they held the ponies to an easy canter and contented themselves with keeping within sound

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mountains at daylight, and we'll never overtake it to-day," said Armstrong.

Then the baying suddenly ceased and the riders stopped to listen. They waited some minutes, but the dogs remained silent. Then they saw Queenie and Roarer working the back trail, and a moment later the rest of the pack came into view. They seemed entirely baffled as they quartered the ground at random. Several times they followed the scent out of sight, and the boys believed they were hot on the trail. But in a few moments silence again proclaimed their failure. Then back they came to try it all over again.

"It's too old; they've probably lost it among the rocks," said the ranchman.

The riders galloped to the dogs and found them ranging aimlessly in an old watercourse. It seemed impossible to find the scent on the other side of this effective barrier. After a half-hour of futile endeavor the dogs acknowledged themselves beaten, and Armstrong called them off and started toward the

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saw two coyotes trying to skulk out of sight.

The dogs instantly gave chase. These coyotes were part of the band that had been loitering near the ranch, and Armstrong was particularly anxious to overtake them. The race was fast but short, for the "wolves" lost much time in running around the ranch fences. The pack gained rapidly, and in less than a mile the coyotes were overtaken and brought to bay. They were immediately surrounded and attacked on all sides. The battle was a furious one, and several dogs were wounded before the "wolves" were finally killed. Roarer was gashed in the shoulder, Scuff had an ear bitten through, and Bruiser limped away on three legs.

"Those are the very lads I wished to get," declared the ranchman as they rode toward the corrals.

They found Tad at the ranch-house, and his first words assured the boys that there was still greater sport in store for them. He said a line rider had reported that a pair of lions

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"We'll go after them to-morrow," said Armstrong.

The following day they started at daylight, and Tad went with them. The boys took their rifles, for the ranchman promised them first chance at the lions. A ride of two hours brought them to the base of the mountains, and there they found the line rider. He was a young fellow, much like Tad, and Armstrong introduced him as Charley.

"They came down again last night and got away with another calf," declared the cowboy. "This mornin' I found the kill up the draw yonder. I reckon if we take the dogs up there they'll be likely to strike a hot scent."

They rode to the head of the draw, and Armstrong went forward with the pack. They found the remains of the calf half hidden in the bushes, and the dogs struck the trail at once. Led by Roarer, they raced up the side of the ravine and disappeared into the timber.

"This is no place for horses," said Armstrong.

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the horses. As soon as they had dismounted the boys began to scramble hurriedly up the side of the ravine.

"Hold on! you can't go at it that way!" laughed Dick. "Let them go till they tree the lion, and then we'll go and kill it."

"You needn't be in any hurry. Once they drive a lion into a tree they'll keep it there till we come," said Armstrong.

They heard the pack baying far up the mountain-side, and the ranchman said he believed they were close to their quarry. The hunters left the horses with Charley and began to climb leisurely in the direction of the sound. But each moment the baying grew fainter, and the boys became worried. They were afraid this lion-hunt might end like the one on the previous day.

"They've taken it over the top," said Armstrong, confidently.

They climbed steadily toward the summit of the mountain, but before they reached it they heard the dogs coming back. The lion had evidently doubled on its tracks. Then

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and they've treed the other one on this side. We'll go over there first," said the ranchman.

They hurried along the mountain-side, and within a half-mile they came in sight of old Roarer and three other dogs. They were barking up a scraggy pinion pine. For some minutes the hunters were unable to make out the lion. Then Roarer ran a few feet along the slanting tree-trunk and the lion moved.

"There he is; I see him!" cried Ed, as he took aim.

"Then shoot him," said George, as he endeavored to get a glimpse of the beast.

Ed fired, and the report was followed by a savage snarl; the tree-top shook, but the lion did not fall.

"Shoot again," urged Dick.

Ed's second shot brought the lion to the ground. But it was not dead, and it immediately gave battle to the dogs. Growling and spitting, it kept them at a safe distance with its paws until Ed sent a third bullet

as he drove off the dogs and stretched out the carcass. "That fellow will measure close to eight feet, and I'll bet he'd have weighed over two hundred pounds in the fall."

"You must shoot the next one," said Ed, turning to George.

In the meantime Roarer and his three companions had rushed away to join their comrades on the other side of the mountain. The crafty old hound had cleverly arranged to have a hand in the killing of both lions.

"You fellows go on and finish the other cat, and I'll stay here and skin this one," proposed Dick.

Armstrong and the boys left him and hurried toward the top of the mountain. Old Roarer's arrival seemed to have put new animation into the pack, and the hunters had little difficulty locating the dogs and their quarry. They were about a third of the way down the mountain-side in a strip of heavy timber. The three hunters slid down, and found them grouped about the base of a large pine. The lion had taken refuge high up

"Perhaps he has jumped across into another tree," suggested George.

"In that case we wouldn't find the dogs barking up into this one," laughed the ranchman. "No, he's up there, all right; but the branches are so thick it's hard to see him from below. Sit down and watch for a few minutes; he will move presently."

At that moment Ed saw it and showed it to George. Armstrong smiled, and the boys knew he had seen it all the time.

George raised his rifle and fired, and the lion launched out into the air, jumping for a neighboring tree. It missed the branch it had tried for and fell to the ground. Before the dogs could surround it three great bounds carried it to a smaller tree, and it sprang into the top.

"There is your chance!" cried Armstrong.

The lion crouched and lashed its sides with its tail. It glared savagely down at the frenzied pack beneath it. Carried away by his enthusiasm, Roarer had begun to climb

mid-air and fell among the dogs. They closed upon it in spite of Armstrong's efforts to keep them off, and a mortal combat ensued. The boys were unable to shoot for fear of killing some of the dogs, and for a few minutes there was great excitement and confusion. They saw one hound killed outright before their eyes. A moment afterward Scuff came from the mêlée with a nasty wound in his side. Then the lion shook off its assailants and attempted to climb another tree, but as it reached the first limb George killed it with a bullet through the heart.

The boys were much depressed over the death of the hound; but the ranchman said such things were to be expected, and declared it was all part of the game. Ed and George buried the dog and built a small monument of stones above the little grave on the mountain-side. Armstrong was silent until the job was completed, then he smiled and nodded his head in approval.

"He died game, and that's the best you can say of a man," he said as they turned

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XII

A FIGHT WITH A GRIZZLY

ED and George arrived at the scene of the round-up early the following day. They made the journey without difficulty, for they had memorized several conspicuous landmarks which served to guide them along the route.

"You got here all right, eh?" laughed Tad. "A week or two more and we'll make circle riders of you."

They witnessed the same bustling activity they had seen before. Most of the "strays" were in, and the work of "cutting out" steers for the trail herd had begun. To facilitate this job the big herd had been divided, and most of the cattle were now held in two separate bunches. The trail herd was being assembled off at one side. They were great, rangy-looking beasts with wide, spreading

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"They're a wild lot, and we're likely to have our hands full before we're through with them," said Tad.

When a steer was "cut" from a bunch of cattle it was taken in charge by a rider and driven to the trail herd. But these recruits sometimes made a bolt for liberty, and then the herder had to ride fast and recklessly to turn them back. The boys saw that "Skinny" Flanders and "Arizona Pete" were doing most of this work, and, eager to share in the excitement, Ed and George offered to help them.

"Why, sure!" said "Skinny," when they proffered their services.

He turned over two wild-looking beasts with directions to deliver them to "Red" Saunders, who was one of those "holding the cut." They had not gone a thousand yards before the steers bolted in the opposite direction. They lowered their heads and galloped across the plain, and the boys raced after them. Vic and Skeets soon overtook

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GENERAL VIEW OF A ROUND-UP

"Hit them across the eyes," shouted George.

Ed slashed the nearest steer across the face, and the maddened brute lunged viciously at Vic. The agile pony side-jumped and crashed into Skeets. The latter went to his knees, but by grasping the pommel George remained in the saddle. A yell of approval went up from the cowboys as Skeets regained his feet and resumed the chase.

In the meantime Ed continued his attack, and the steer gave way and crowded its companion from the course. Inch by inch they swerved and swung around in the direction of the herd. The boys pressed their advantage, and when they neared "Red" they slackened their pace. The steers slowed down, and Saunders rounded them up without difficulty.

"Well done," said Tad. "You handled that job like veterans."

The boys liked the work, and after dinner they went back to it. They had other adventures in the afternoon, but they made good, and by the time the day was over

Then came the jolly evening meal, with its good-fellowship and its light-hearted banter. Each man went to the rear of the mess-wagon for his rations. When they had been doled out to him he sat cross-legged in the circle of merry men on the ground. Having proved their mettle, Ed and George were made to feel thoroughly at home, and they ate with a relish that only work in the open can give.

When supper was over some of the men rode away to relieve those watching the herds. The horses, with the exception of the ones required for night herding, were driven to pasture by the night wranglers, whose duty it was to guard them until daylight.

Then the long prairie twilight settled down and the cowboys had their hour of play. They indulged in rope-spinning contests, wrestling-matches, foot and horse races, and various other sports familiar to men of the plains. The boys took a lively interest in this part of the programme and before it

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gathered about it to tell stories and sing songs. "Sonny" Stevens had a harmonica, and upon request he played several lively selections which were enthusiastically encored. When the entertainment finally ended, Tad yawned and said it was time to "turn in."

Each man spread a strip of tarpaulin on the ground, placed his saddle at his head for a pillow, rolled himself in his blankets, and drew the bottom half of the "tarp" up over him to keep off the dew. There were no "good nights," no useless talk, for everybody was ready to sleep.

Ed and George found the experience a novel one, and for some time they remained awake to enjoy it. They lay with their faces upturned to the stars, and listened to the lowing of the cattle, the calls of the night herders, the heavy breathing of the men beside them, the squealing of quarrelsome broncos, and many other sounds peculiar to a great cow-camp. Then fatigue deadened their ears, and their heavy eyelids closed in sleep.

"Roll out, roll out, everybody!"

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Men were eating at the mess-wagon; the night herders had come in; the horse-wranglers were returning with the ponies; everybody seemed to be in a hurry. It was barely dawn, and still every one was wide awake and busy. Ed and George stood in line for their share of cold beans, bacon, and coffee, the customary morning rations.

The ponies were driven into a rope corral, and as each man finished eating he took his lariat and went to rope his horse. Some had no difficulty, for their mounts stood until the noose settled about their necks. But others had more trouble, and it took them some time to capture their elusive broncos. The boys were surprised to see "Skinny" bridle and saddle the big black mustang and ride away without a struggle. After the horses for the morning's work had been "cut" from the herd, the boys rounded up Vic and Skeets.

Tad had received word of a bunch of "strays" which had gone "wild"; a circle rider had located them the day before, but

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"If they're where I think they are, we're due for some rough riding," said Tad, as they started away.

He rode toward the foothills, for the circle rider said he had left the "strays" at the edge of the plain. They rode at an easy canter, and in two hours they approached the ridges. Every ravine was searched, every nook and corner explored, but they saw nothing of the "strays." Then they searched along the edge of the plain with no better result. They looked everywhere, but the "strays" had disappeared.

"Something stampeded them in the night," suggested "Skinny."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tad. "And let's hope they ran toward the herd."

They saw a small grove of cottonwoods a short distance out on the plain, and they rode forward to investigate. As they approached the trees the ponies began to snort, and "Skinny's" mustang wheeled and tried to bolt.

"There's a bear in there," said Tad. "Now we'll have some fun."

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ciency for a hand-to-hand encounter with a grizzly. They would have felt much more confident if they had had their rifles. But Tad seemed to think a weapon of any sort superfluous.

"Come on, 'Skinny,' let's drive him out and rope him," he proposed, recklessly.

The boys thought he was joking, until they saw him untying his lariat. "Skinny" laughed and expressed his willingness to take part in the adventure. But they could not rope the bear where it was; some one would have to go into the grove and drive Bruin out. Tad looked at the boys.

"I'll tackle the job," said Ed.

"And I'll help you," declared George.

"You both can't go," said Tad, pleased at their nerve. "One will have to stay with the horses."

They drew blades of grass to see who should go, and Ed won the privilege. He dismounted and walked toward the grove.

"Don't shoot unless he rushes you," Tad cautioned.

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When Ed came to the edge of the timber he stopped to look for the bear. It was nowhere in sight, and he drew his revolver and entered the grove. He advanced cautiously, with every nerve alert. Ed did not know whether he was stalking a black bear or a grizzly. He did not know whether it was a solitary old wanderer or a mother bear with cubs. He did not know whether it would show fight or seek safety in flight. In fact, there was a big uncertainty in his mind as to just what might happen in the next few minutes.

Then he heard a noise in some bushes at his right. He saw them move—something was coming toward him. A moment later a large grizzly appeared. When it saw him it stopped and began to sniff the air. Ed remained motionless with his eyes focused on those of the bear. The minutes that passed seemed like hours, until Bruin finally turned and began a slow retreat. Ed waited a moment or two, and then he followed it.

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desire to anger it into charging. The bear reached the edge of the plain and started toward the mountains.

"Here he is!" cried "Skinny," as he rode between the bear and the cottonwoods.

Having performed his task, Ed ran from the timber to see the fun. Finding itself cut off from shelter, the grizzly started to gallop awkwardly across the plain, and "Skinny" cantered after it. He could not coax the mustang near enough to throw his rope, but Tad came galloping around the end of the grove and immediately joined the chase.

Swinging his rope, Tad raced his pony past the bear, and as the grizzly turned at bay he shot the noose over its head. The bear came to a sudden stop, and the pony went to its knees. Then the infuriated captive charged, but Tad raced from danger and brought the bear up short. It began to bite and claw the rope. Then Tad manœuvered skilfully, and threw the grizzly upon its side. It was up in an instant, roaring furiously.

"Get your rope on him, and we'll stretch him out," cried Tad.

frantic with fear. Rearing and plunging, it did its best to unseat its rider and bolt from the scene of danger. But "Skinny" was determined, and at last he flashed past within range of the bear, and threw his rope. He tried to rope a hind foot, but the bear threw itself upon its haunches at that instant, and he missed. He raced away with the rope trailing behind him, for Satan had taken the bit between his teeth, and "Skinny" was powerless to stop him.

In the meantime the grizzly had again closed its jaws on the rope, and Tad was unable to work it free. In less than a minute the sharp fangs did their work, and the bear was free. It ran for the timber, and the boys rode out to intercept it. At Tad's order they drew their revolvers and began to shoot. George missed, but Ed hit the bear in the back. Wild with rage, it wheeled and charged him, and Vic was obliged to extend himself to get out of its way. George put two bul-

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"Hold on! Not so fast," cautioned Tad. "We've got a ticklish job on our hands now. I started this foolishness, and I'm the one to finish it."

He drew his gun; but the boys hesitated. They did not wish to be left out at the finish. It seemed too much like quitting to turn over the dangerous part of the job to Tad. They tried to make him look at it in that light, and at last he yielded.

"Here comes 'Skinny'; we'll punish him for running away, and make him stay outside with the horses," laughed Tad.

"Skinny" objected strenuously. "You fellows have had all the fun, and now you want to shut me out just when there's a chance for a little excitement."

But they overruled his objection, and, finding himself outvoted three to one, poor "Skinny" resigned himself to his fate. Having settled the matter, Tad and the boys dismounted and entered the timber.

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Tad found the trail and called the boys. A few yards farther on they came upon the bear. It rose to its feet and tried to rush them. But it was mortally wounded, and as the boys opened fire it collapsed.

"Got him?" called "Skinny."

"You bet," shouted Tad.

They skinned the carcass and carried the pelt out to show to "Skinny." As soon as they appeared the mustang tried to run; it seemed to fear the skin as greatly as it had feared the live bear.

"You had better get rid of that horse before he kills you," laughed Tad, as "Skinny" battled with his mount.

"I didn't train him for bear-huntin'," declared "Skinny," indignantly.

As there was little likelihood of finding the "strays" in the immediate vicinity, the riders set out for camp. They believed the bear had come from the mountains the night before and stampeded the cattle.

"We'll probably get word of them from some of the boys. If we don't we'll hunt them again to-morrow," said Tad.

XIII

WILD HORSES

SUN-UP found the boys in the saddle; they were accompanied by Tad, "Skinny," "Arizona," and "Red." They counted it a privilege to be with such veterans, and they believed the day promised much excitement.

Tad said the horses they sought were range animals that had run off and joined a small herd of wild stock. He said they were under the leadership of a wild stallion, a handsome red roan, that was coveted and hunted by every range rider that saw it.

"But no one has caught it, and I reckon no one will until we breed faster horses than we've got now," said Tad. "However, I'll take some of that back," he added, as a mischievous twinkle showed in his eyes. "If

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about, I allow to bring that same four-footed speed machine you mention into camp at the end of my rope," said "Skinny," soberly.

The others laughed heartily at his boast.

"Where have I heard such talk before?" inquired "Arizona," thoughtfully stroking his brow.

"If you're alludin' to the red roan, I'll tell you right now that your black cayuse won't get you near enough to the roan to smell its dust. I know, 'cause I've chased that same roan some myself," declared "Red."

"Maybe so," laughed "Skinny."

The boys looked forward to the promised race between the red roan and "Skinny's" black mustang. They had thought of wild horses as things of the past, and the prospect of actually hunting them aroused their keenest enthusiasm.

"Where did these wild horses come from?" inquired Ed.

"Blessed if I know," confessed Tad. "Some say they were left behind by the old Spanish explorers."

phatically. "Injuns didn't scatter ponies around promiscuous like."

They rode along at the base of the mountains until they came to a narrow, cañon-like pass. It brought them to a great circular basin entirely walled in by mountains. It was as if the latter had stretched forth their arms and folded a part of the plain to their bosom. This sheltered spot was a natural pasture, for it was carpeted with an abundance of good grass and watered by a stream from the mountains.

"Go easy, boys; I believe we've found the stamping-ground of the red roan and his band," said Tad.

They halted at the end of the narrow defile and looked across the level reaches of the land-locked plain. On the other side they saw the wild stallion and his mates. There were ten of them.

"Well, we've got them bottled up," said Tad. "But with a stretch like that to run over, they can keep us busy for a long time."

Then the red roan discovered them. They

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mustang answered him. Then the whole band began to canter nervously along the border of the basin. But they did not go far before they stopped and wheeled to face the intruders, who were grouped at the head of the pass.

"They certainly have sharp eyes," said Ed.

"And what's more, they know how to use them," declared "Red."

The roan stood silent and immovable while he studied the distant horsemen. He seemed to realize the advantage of distance, and he showed no inclination to go nearer. His wild band grouped themselves behind him, ready to break into flight at a sign from their leader. They were timid and nervous, but the roan seemed calm and unafraid.

"Let's start business," said Tad.

He placed "Red" on guard at the edge of the plain to block the pass. His idea was to make a trap of the narrow defile and to drive the roan and his band into it. It seemed a very simple thing to do, for the horses naturally would try to reach the open plain when they

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"What's worrying you?" demanded Tad.

"I don't believe the roan will run into the trap," said "Red." "He's uncommon foxy about seein' a trick."

"Then, 'Skinny,' maybe you and Satan will have a chance to make good your boast," laughed Tad.

"I allow to," said "Skinny," as he began to stretch and coil his rope.

"'Red,' remember you're to keep out of sight until you hear them rattling toward you," Tad cautioned.

"They'll need spectacles to see me," "Red" assured him. "And say, 'Arizona,' if 'Skinny' sets out to overhaul that four-footed piece of greased lightning, come out and give me a chance to see the fun," he laughed.

"Sure I will," agreed "Arizona."

Then the four horsemen rode into the basin. The moment they appeared the wild horses broke into flight. The roan cantered gracefully in the lead, and the others followed in single file close behind him. They began to

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"They sure snip along easy like, don't they?" said "Arizona."

"That little piebald, running fourth, is about the meanest horse we ever burned a brand into. He's run wild for the past three seasons, and if I owned him he could keep it up for the rest of his useless career," said Tad.

"Skinny" was silent, and they saw that he was watching every move of the great red roan.

"Let them circle, and we'll drop in behind them and drive them around. If we crowd them some, they'll bolt into the pass, and then we'll have them," said Tad.

But the roan was crafty, and when the horsemen failed to advance he stopped, and his mates stopped behind him. He seemed determined to spare himself and his band all useless effort.

"That's right, old boy, don't run unless you're chased," laughed "Arizona."

"He certainly is foxy," said Ed.

The bunch of horses were a mile or more away and slightly to the right of the horse

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tered it, they would see "Red" and rush back into the basin. Then it might take hours to ride them down. It was necessary, therefore, that Tad and his men should approach as near to them as possible before the race began. The horsemen went forward at a walk; but the roan was undeceived, and when he saw them in motion he urged his mates into a sharp gallop.

"Come on, boys, we've got to cut down that lead!" cried Tad, as he galloped his pony toward a point several rods ahead of the herd.

The ground was level and free from rocks, and the boys found the riding easy. When the wild band finally approached the pass their pursuers were close behind them. Then what "Red" had predicted happened. As his mates crowded into the narrow defile the roan swerved aside and raced for the opposite side of the basin, and "Skinny" rode after him.

"The chase has begun!" cried Ed, excitedly.

In the meantime Tad and "Arizona" had closed the pass and effectively "bottled up"

they turned to watch "Skinny" run down the red roan.

The roan had a start of fifty yards, and in his first wild sprint he increased it to sixty. Then Satan seemed to realize that he was being left behind. With his neck extended and his ears flattened, he set out to overtake his rival. His legs moved so fast that his feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground. But the distance between the roan and himself remained the same.

"That's what I call runnin'," said "Arizona," enthusiastically.

"It sure is," agreed Tad.

The roan reached the opposite side of the basin and started around the edge. "Skinny" swerved the mustang and gained several yards. Each moment they appeared to run faster. Despite the weight of the man on his back, Satan seemed able to hold his own. When they were two-thirds of the way around the roan cut diagonally for the other side, and "Skinny" made another gain.

"Stay with him!" shouted Tad.

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They raced through the center of the basin

down the roan's lead. The pace was a killing one, and it seemed as though both animals must soon succumb to it. But as yet they showed no signs of weakening, and the thrilling race looked like a long one. "Skinny" had only to get within roping distance to end it, but to get so close Satan would have to gain two-thirds of his rival's lead.

Once more they turned to circle the edge of the basin. This time there was less daylight between the horses, and if Satan could hold the pace the onlookers believed another round of the course would put "Skinny" within roping range.

"The roan has met his match," declared Tad.

But at that particular moment their attention was diverted by three shots at the other end of the pass. They were followed by a wild yell from "Red."

"They've rushed him!" cried Tad, as he galloped from the basin.

"Stay and see the finish," said "Arizona," as he rode after the foreman.

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pass, and they've gone to round them up," said George.

"Perhaps we should help them."

"By the time we reached the plain they would be so far ahead that we could never overtake them."

Then they saw "Skinny" swinging his rope, and again their eyes were fixed on the race. He threw his rope, but it fell short; he was still out of range. The roan seemed to realize its danger, for it redoubled its efforts and increased its lead. "Skinny" used his heavy riding-quirt for the first time since the start of the race, and under the sting of it Satan checked the gain. Then, as "Skinny" continued to urge him, the mustang began to retrieve his loss. Inch by inch, foot by foot, yard by yard, he shortened the gap between them. It was a stupendous effort, and the boys feared its effect on their favorite. But Satan never faltered in his stride, and although his handsome black coat

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"That's so; I don't believe 'Skinny' would like it."

The roan again swerved across the basin, and "Skinny" seemed determined to catch him before he reached the other side. He spared neither himself nor his horse. Steadily he plied his quirt, and Satan, maddened by the blows, ran as only one of his blood could run. He was descended from a strain of fighters, four-footed aristocrats of the plains like the red roan himself. Years of careful breeding had given him speed for his birthright, gameness for his inheritance. "Skinny" knew he possessed these priceless qualities when he risked his life to break him. Now he was reaping his reward.

"He's catching him!" cried Ed, delightedly. "Go on, Satan!"

"Skinny" again swung his rope, but the roan heard the swish of it, and put every last ounce of strength into his stride. A foot, two feet, a yard he gained, and then "Skinny" used his spurs. Satan recovered the loss at

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other side. "Skinny" was risking all on this last wild dash. No horse could hold the pace to which he was urging Satan. He was demanding a life effort, and he was getting it.

"Look!" shouted George. "He's gaining again."

They were within a hundred yards of the other side, but with every stride Satan was closing the gap. The roan tried to spurt, but its strength collapsed with the effort. "Skinny" threw his rope, and this time the noose settled about the roan's neck.

"Hurrah! He has him!" shouted Ed, as he raced Vic across the basin.

Squealing with rage, the roan turned to fight to the death. It rushed at Satan again and again with open mouth and flashing eyes, a very demon of rage and despair. For almost an hour it fought against its fate. Then, thoroughly exhausted, it became reconciled, and "Skinny" led it from the basin.

"If I had some of the boys to help me, I'd

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XIV

OFF WITH THE TRAIL HERD

TWO days later the great trail herd began its long journey. Twelve picked riders accompanied it. Among them were Tad, "Skinny" Flanders, "Arizona" Pete, "Red" Saunders, and Ed and George. A four-horse "chuck" wagon, driven by a range cook and his assistant, was sent ahead with instructions to wait for them at the first camping-place.

It was an interesting spectacle—the straggling company of long-horned steers moving slowly out upon the plain, the galloping ponies with their shouting riders, and over all the floating dust-cloud that would thicken as they progressed, until herd and herders were choked and stifled.

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Armstrong and Dick, who had come from the ranch to see them start.

"I shouldn't wonder," said the ranchmen. "Good luck, boys; I hope you'll enjoy it."

"Don't forget to come back for me," laughed Dick, as they shook his hand.

Then they galloped away with Tad, and took their places with him in the rear of the herd. Their task was to drive forward the laggards, and to see that none were left behind. But the foreman soon left them and galloped to the front, and the boys hailed "Arizona," who also was riding in the rear of the drive.

"Hello," said "Arizona." "Got any neck-pieces?" he inquired, indicating the yellow kerchief loosely knotted about his throat.

Each of the boys produced a blue bandana.

"Tie them around your neck, and let them hang down loose in front. Then when the dust begins to get bad pull them up over your mouth and nose. So long; see you later." And, having given his valuable advice, he cantered back to his position.

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other cowboys were at the left. They rode in line a short distance behind the last steers. The boys found their work easy, as the animals in the center were held in place by those beside them. But the steers along the edge of the herd were constantly breaking out, and the riders at each side had many exciting sprints.

"Tad put us in a soft place," laughed Ed.

"We'll probably get harder work when we learn the job," said George.

The day was hot and sultry, and Tad allowed the steers to make their own pace. It was a slow one, and the boys found the riding rather monotonous. Hour after hour they plodded on through the dust from four thousand shuffling hoofs. They were thankful for "Arizona's" hint about the kerchiefs. They drew the bandanas well up toward their eyes and found some relief.

Then the rear of the herd began to hang back, and Ed and George went into action.

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realized that for some reason the herd was breaking up.

"Push them along!" shouted Tad. "I've put a couple of riders in front to hold back the leaders. There's a wild bunch up ahead, and they're trying to make a race of it. They'll quiet down by to-morrow. How are you making it?" he asked the boys.

"All right," said Ed.

He galloped along the line and stopped a moment to talk with "Arizona." Then he disappeared around the end of the herd.

"His job is no snap," declared Ed.

"I should say not; and think of his responsibility!" said George.

When the impetuous leaders had been checked, the herd closed ranks. Then for more weary hours they shuffled their way across the blistering plain. As the day wore on the animals grew tired and irritable. They showed it by bawling and tossing their heads restlessly. They resented the crowding to

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separate them. They rode toward them, shouting and snapping their quirts, but the enraged animals continued the battle. They had withdrawn from the herd, and were charging furiously at each other. The encounter threatened to be a fatal one, and the boys were determined to stop it. They rode up close and rained blows on the backs of the fighters. Then one of the steers wheeled and charged them.

"Look out!" cried George, as Skeets sprinted from danger.

It was a narrow escape for Ed; the steer's horns passed within less than a foot of his horse. George had meantime driven the other combatant into the herd. But other steers had dropped back through the opening left by the boys. Several of them showed an inclination to bolt, and the boys had a hard time rounding them up. When they had driven in all the deserters, they resumed their places at the rear of the herd and closed the

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crowd forward. The boys saw smoke ascending, and they knew they had overtaken the "chuck" wagon. The day's travel was done, and they were not sorry. The herd stopped and spread out. They had come to a watercourse. Farther along it, near the inevitable cottonwoods, was the wagon and the horses. The steers crowded into the water to drink, and the men and ponies drank above them. Then the herd began to graze, and Tad left it in charge of four riders, while the rest hurried to the "chuck" wagon.

"They're travelin' fine," said "Red," as they sat on the ground to eat.

"Don't begin braggin' too soon," cautioned "Arizona." "There's no tellin' what will happen with a bunch like this."

"'Arizona,' you're sure like a fussy old hen with her first brood of chicks," drawled "Skinny." "Don't look so far ahead for trouble; you're likely to hurt your eyes."

"The recklessness of youth is plumb amazin'," sighed "Red."

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herd under constant guard. Ed and George were appointed to the first watch, with "Arizona" and another cowboy. The second watch was the disagreeable one, and Tad elected himself one of the four. The third watch included "Skinny" and "Red."

The steers were still grazing when the first watch went to relieve the men on guard. "Arizona" stationed the boys and defined their patrols. Then he left them and rode away to take his own position. As long as the steers continued to feed there was little to do, except to watch and to hold them in some sort of loose formation.

By the time twilight came the herd had finished grazing and many of the animals had lain down. But there were a score or more meddlesome brutes that wandered about creating trouble. They fought with one another, bullied those of their companions that failed to oppose them, and compelled many of the animals on the ground to rise. Then they would break from the herd, and when they were driven back they invariably en-

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finally tired of their viciousness and became quiet.

With the falling of darkness Ed and George felt the real thrill of night herding. Once the heavens had stretched their starry canopy over the plain, that compact square of nervous brutes became an uncertainty. Like a pent-up torrent, it might at any moment break through its barriers and sweep its guardians to their deaths. A flash of light, the crash of thunder, the howl of a wolf, the report of a gun, any of these might set it in motion.

The boys felt their responsibility, and they performed their duty faithfully. They rode slowly along the edge of the herd, with their eyes and their ears ever on the alert for trouble. The animals seemed to be resting, and the riders were careful not to disturb them. Then a steer began to bawl, and "Arizona" raised his voice in song. He had told the boys that this was one way of quieting a restless herd, and they wondered if the animals were becoming uneasy. They heard the cowboy at the other end of the herd take

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to head them off, and they turned and melted into the herd. Then everything was quiet, and the danger seemed to have passed.

The boys continued their lonely patrols. They moved slowly through the dark, horse and rider equally alert to the possibilities. To Ed and George the experience was new and fascinating; to their ponies it was but a familiar part of the daily routine. At the end of four hours they were relieved by Tad and the men of the second watch.

"Is everything all right?" inquired the foreman, jovially, as he rode up to Ed.

"Yes; they seem to be quiet," replied Ed.

"There's a locoed critter down where I was that needs shootin'," declared "Arizona," disgustedly. "I've ruined what some would call a real nice voice tryin' to sing him to sleep."

Their work for the day was ended, and they cantered toward the "chuck" wagon, glad of the opportunity to roll themselves in their blankets.

The next morning they were roused before

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places the animals were again started on the wearisome journey. As on the previous day, Ed and George were stationed at the rear with "Arizona" and Bill.

At the end of two hours they came in sight of the "chuck" wagon. It was hopelessly mired in a bog-hole. The boys offered to go to the rescue, and Tad assigned them to the job.

"Fasten your ropes to it, and start your ponies together," he cautioned, as they galloped away.

They found the cook in a bad humor, and his manner indicated that he placed little reliance in the ability of the boys. He had urged his four broncos into a frenzy, and they were wild and unmanageable. The boys saw that it would be useless to make an attempt at rescue until the rebellious animals had been calmed. George began to talk quietly to them, but they regarded him with wild, sullen eyes, and flattened their ears and snapped viciously as he reached for the bridles.

"Come on; if they could have pulled it out alone we wouldn't be here now. Fasten your

The boys flushed with anger at his allusion to Vic and Skeets, and they determined to prove what those clever little beasts could do. They fastened their ropes to the wagon, and when the cook gave his command they started the ponies. Vic and Skeets pulled valiantly, but the driver began to shout and use his whip, and the other horses rose on their hind legs and pawed the air.

"I knew you couldn't do it," declared the cook, when the effort failed. "It will take all the horses in the outfit to get me out of here."

"I believe we can get you out all right if you'll allow your team to calm down," said Ed, quietly.

The man glared at him in astonishment, and his assistant, a young fellow about the boys' age, began to smile in anticipation. For a moment the driver was dumb with amazement, then he recovered himself and launched forth into a tirade.

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"I only offered a suggestion," Ed explained.

The herd and the riders had gone on, and the boys felt that Tad had left them because he believed them competent to extricate the hot-tempered cook from his difficulty. They realized that to do this they would have to humor him, for nothing could be gained by quarreling. They sat silently awaiting his orders. In the meantime his team had a chance to quiet down, and the boys believed their next attempt would be successful.

Without a word of warning the driver cracked his whip, and the six horses strained to move the wagon. In spite of his shouts and the sting of his whip, his team did their duty, and, aided by the cow-ponies, they pulled the wagon to firm ground.

"All right!" he called. "Untie your ropes!"

The boys lost little time in disconnecting themselves from such unpleasant company. Without so much as thanking them, the driver cracked his long whip and started on his way. But his half-wild team were still

rock, and the cook was thrown to the ground. Then, with the reins dragging, the runaways raced across the plain, and the white-faced youth on the seat was powerless to stop them.

"Come on," shouted Ed, as he touched Vic with his spurs.

At the end of a mile the boys drew up beside the wagon. Then inch by inch they fought their way toward the heads of the leaders. At last they got near enough to reach out and grasp the bridles. But the runaways refused to swerve, and the riders were in danger of being dragged beneath their hoofs. They were running directly toward the herd, and the boys realized that a stampede might result unless they stopped them before they reached it. They jerked savagely on the cruel bits, but the broncos shut their teeth against them and raced on. Then the boys began to lash them across the eyes with their quirts, and, unable to withstand the punishment, the runaways surrendered.

When the boys had brought them to a stop, they turned them over to the cook's assistant

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XV

CAUGHT IN A STAMPEDE

BY the time the sun rose the herd was some miles on its journey. Steers and riders both took advantage of the cool, morning hours, and the pace was faster than during the fierce heat of midday. The animals had learned to travel together, and there was less breaking from the ranks.

"This is a snap," laughed Ed.

"So far, so good; but we've a long day before us," George reminded him.

They were nearing the Bad Lands. The next day they would cross the upper end of them. Already the plain was beginning to change. It seemed drier, more barren, and less hospitable. Grass gave way to patches

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The "chuck" wagon awaited them at a waterhole. The pasturage was the poorest they had encountered, but it was also the last this side of the dry waste they expected to cross. The water had the flat, alkali taste of desert water. The steers drank sparingly; then they scattered to make a meal of the scant crop of sun-scorched grass. It seemed impossible that even such poor stuff could have grown from the arid soil. It was shriveled and dry and unsatisfying; and after they had eaten it the steers were still hungry. They wandered about sniffing and pawing in search for more food.

"It looks like we might have trouble with those lads before the night is over. Put them on short rations and they soon get peevish," said "Red," as he joined the circle of men on the ground.

"'There's interestin' possibilities in the chances,' as old Squire Hopkins would say," laughed "Arizona." "I reckon I've told you about that same Texas preacher. I remember once—"

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"Arizona" took the hint and subsided into gloomy silence.

"Boys, we're due for a thunder-storm. Look at those clouds pilin' up over yonder," said "Red," changing the subject.

"I've been watchin' them all afternoon," said "Arizona."

The breeze had died away, and the air was hot and stifling. The sun had dropped behind the clouds, and a murky half-light flooded the plain. Everything was stilled; the ending of the day was gloomy and foreboding. Conversation dragged, and the men cast furtive glances at the western horizon. The boys feared they saw danger in the darkening cloud-bank.

The evening meal was served early. While they were eating it Tad returned from the herd. He seemed serious and troubled.

"They're acting nasty, and I don't like the looks of things a little bit. There's a storm brewing, and if it gets here after dark we're likely to have a stampede."

The boys started at the word, for they fully realized all it meant. They had read of

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and "Arizona" tell of their narrow escapes, for all three had faced the danger. The peril had come home to Ed and George. They, too, were threatened by it, for their duty demanded that they should share the risk. Tad's announcement was received in silence. Every man in the circle had foreseen the danger hours before. "Skinny" rolled and lighted a cigarette.

"The storm don't appear to be runnin' itself out of breath to get here," he said, quietly.

"No, but when it does start it will come fast," declared "Arizona."

"You bet," agreed "Red."

"What's your plan, Tad?" inquired "Skinny."

"My plan is to prevent the herd from starting. It will take all hands to do that. Once they get under way, there's no telling what will happen."

The men rose and began to saddle their horses; they had picketed them to a rope stretched between a stake and the "chuck" wagon. Tad took the opportunity to call the

of work we're likely to get before daylight. You're here by my invitation, and there's no reason why you should run any risks."

"Wait, Tad," Ed interrupted. "I believe you have sized us up by this time, and I hope you don't think we're the sort to quit under fire. We certainly intend to do what we can to help you hold the herd, and we're not afraid to share the danger."

"That's business straight from the shoulder," laughed Tad. "I'll accept your services with thanks. And say, I reckon I sized you up right."

They thanked him and hurried toward the horses. The other men were already in the saddle. The boys tightened the cinches with hastening fingers. Then they mounted and galloped after their comrades. Tad slowed down to wait for them.

"Of course, what we're worrying about may not happen, and we'll hope that it doesn't," he said. "But there's just one bit of advice I wish to give you; if a stampede should start, keep on the edge of it. Try to turn the steers by crowding them from the outside, but don't

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the bunch till you get a chance to work out. For the rest use your sense and keep cool."

The herd had become noisy and troublesome. Tad assigned the boys to their places and left them. They noticed that "Skinny" rode Satan, and they believed he expected a run. There was plenty of work, for the steers were constantly attempting to break through the line of horsemen. Tad had stationed his entire company of riders about the herd, with the hope that when the animals found themselves completely hemmed in they would lie down and become quiet. But they seemed much wrought up, and only a few showed any desire to rest. These were soon aroused by their restless companions, and the confusion increased.

In the meantime twilight had given place to darkness; but the night was clear and fine. A multitude of stars shone overhead, and out of the west came a gentle breeze, perfumed with the spicy fragrance of the sage.

"I don't believe we'll get that shower after

It sobered them, for they realized that the storm was approaching. What would the herd do? That was the first question that came into their minds. They were afraid to answer it. A flash of lightning cut the western sky, and a louder roll of thunder followed it.

"We're in for it," cried Ed, as he wheeled and went back over his lonely patrol.

The breeze grew stronger, and the stars disappeared. It was almost impossible to see the herd. Steers and riders were swallowed up in blackness. The boys untied their slickers from behind their saddles and put them on. They heard "Arizona" singing far away in the night. Then they heard a galloping pony, and a moment later Tad rode by.

"When the storm breaks ride in close to the herd," he shouted. "Don't let them get away."

"Don't let them get away"; the words rang in their ears. Until that moment they had not realized that they might be the ones

realized now that it was impossible to foretell which part of the herd would lead the stampede.

True to "Arizona's" prophecy, once started, the storm made rapid headway. Within an hour it was upon them. A blinding flash of light and a deafening crash of thunder began it. Then the rain came; it fell in torrents. Each vivid flash showed the steers crowding together in panic. At any moment they were likely to break for the open. If they reached it they would be beyond control. The riders raised their voices to give them confidence, but the sound was drowned in the tumult of the elements.

At the height of the storm the herd stampeded. Like a bombshell it broke and scattered in all directions. The boys were caught in the jam. Powerless to help themselves, they gave their ponies a free rein, and the experienced beasts turned and ran with the stampede. They were completely closed in by the mass of panic-stricken steers. Neither was aware that the other had been trapped, and each though himself alone in his peril.

The intelligent little broncos seemed to realize that their safety depended upon their ability to maintain the pace. A fall meant instant destruction beneath galloping hoofs. Once started, there could be no stopping, at least not until the herd had exhausted itself. At each flash of light the boys looked about them at the sea of tossing horns. Then they saw each other; they were only a few yards apart.

"We must be well toward the front; let's try to sprint past the animals ahead of us," shouted George.

The attempt failed, for the steers in front seemed determined to hold the lead, and as the boys gained upon them they quickened their pace. But with the effort the lads came nearer together, and by skilful manœuvering they finally were able to ride side by side. The companionship gave them a feeling of greater confidence, and the danger seemed less than when they had faced it alone.

"We're all right if we don't fall," said

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light to show us where we are going," declared Ed. "Sometimes these stampedes end over the edge of a cliff or pile up in the bottom of a ravine."

"I wonder how many steers are in this bunch?"

"Not more than a third of the herd; most of them went the other way," said Ed.

The animals began to crowd together, and the boys found themselves in close quarters. They used their riding-quirts to make room for the horses. They feared that Vic and Skeets would be tripped and thrown. But the broncos held their ground, and when a steer tried to shoulder them aside they defended themselves with their teeth. The ground was rough, and the rain made it slippery. The boys were in constant fear of a fall. Even though their mounts kept upon their feet, there was a possibility that some of the foremost animals would fall and bring the horses and their riders down on top of

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idea. All sense of direction had left them, for the leaders had several times changed their course. They began to fear that after all their ponies might give out. Vic and Skeets were white with sweat, and their breathing was hard and labored. The steers, too, began to show the effect of their exertions. They breathed in short, rasping gasps, and a steamy vapor rose from their overheated bodies. It had become a matter of endurance, for it seemed impossible for the steers to stop until halted by exhaustion.

The boys had many narrow escapes, but as yet they were unharmed. Several times they were obliged to free their feet from the stirrups and raise their legs to avoid having them crushed. Once Vic stumbled, and Ed believed his end had come, but the pony recovered and the danger passed.

"Let's try to work toward the outside," urged George.

"It will be impossible," declared Ed

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by the great sweat-caked brutes that surrounded them. But they showed no signs of collapse, and the boys had hopes that they would survive the grilling ordeal. Fatigue, however, added to the danger. The boys realized that a spent horse meant death.

The leaders again swerved, and the herd turned to follow them. The boys were crushed in a jam, and Ed had his leg painfully bruised. They lashed out viciously with their quirts and opened a way for their tired mounts. They had entered a stretch of rougher ground, and the steers were obliged to slacken their pace. The boys braced themselves in their saddles and tightened the bridle-reins. It seemed impossible that the mass of crowding steers could race over such footing without piling themselves into a heap.

"I'm afraid I'm done for. Vic seems to have gone lame," said Ed, calmly.

"If he falters, jump up behind me," cried George. "Great Scott, Ed, we've lasted through

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"They're slowing down!" cried George, excitedly. "See! We have more room—they're spreading out! Hurrah, we're safe!"

The steers appeared to have expended their energy. The front ranks slowed down, and those behind seemed quite willing to follow their lead. In a few moments they had come to a trot, then they subsided into a walk, and finally they stopped.

"Now is our time!" cried Ed, as he turned Vic to one side.

The steers stood with hanging heads and allowed the boys to crowd them aside and ride into the open.

"That was what I call a close squeak," said Ed, solemnly.

"I thought it was all up with us," declared George. "But where are we, and how far have we come?"

"I've an idea we're in the Bad Lands."

"Do you really think so? Well, if we are, we'll have a fine old time getting out!"

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XVI

LOST IN THE BAD LANDS

DAYLIGHT confirmed the boys' fears; they found themselves in the Bad Lands. On every side they saw grim evidences of desolation. Out of the dawn came queer, fantastic shapes, strange monuments of clay and sand, modeled and set there by the elements. Except for a few straggling clumps of half-burned sage, the place was bare of vegetation. It stretched away for miles, a barren waste of rock and alkali. The surroundings were weird and uncanny, and as the boys looked about them they became gloomy and depressed.

"We're in good and deep this time," said Ed.

"It seems so," agreed George.

The steers began to move forward, and the boys made no attempt to stop them. They

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give them the opportunity. But the herd was hopelessly lost, and at the end of an hour it had led them into still more desolate surroundings. There was no sign either of food or water, and the steers began to paw the ground and stir up the dust.

"It's up to us to get them out of here," said Ed.

"Let's see if we can back-track and learn which way we came in," proposed George.

They found the task hopeless. The ground was as hard and as unimpressionable as a floor. They abandoned the effort and returned to the herd. The steers had scattered, and the boys had considerable difficulty in rounding them up. They were hungry and thirsty, and the boys saw no way to give them relief.

"There doesn't seem to be any end to this abominable place," declared Ed, disgustedly. "It all looks the same."

"Well, let's drive them ahead and try to find water; my throat is burning up," said George.

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hope of finding water in that parched waste of barren soil. The sun rose, and they took their bearings. They drove the herd toward the east, for they had camped on the west of the Bad Lands the previous night; and, as Tad had said they must cross them, they believed that the Twin Circle Ranch and fertile country was in that direction. But after several hours they found themselves in a "pocket," and they were forced to retrace their course.

By that time the sun was high on its circuit, and the heat became intense. There was no relief, as there was nothing to make shade. The glare was blinding, and the air was like a blast from a furnace. Even the game little broncos began to droop.

"This is fierce," said George, thickly. "I'm burning up with thirst."

"Don't think about it; we'll probably find water before long," said Ed, encouragingly.

They rode along in silence. The steers bawled incessantly for water. The long run on the night before had weakened them. They began to "mill" by crowding together

Then they again drove them forward. It was hot, exhausting work, and they felt the effect of it. They had not tasted food since the day before, but that was of little consequence compared to their suffering from thirst. Water was the one thing they craved.

"I've read of a remedy for this," said Ed, as he dismounted. He picked up a small pebble and placed it in his mouth. "Try it," he urged George. "It promotes the flow of saliva."

Then, as he stooped to get one for George, they heard a loud, locust-like buzzing, which seemed to come from beside a patch of sage. They looked, and saw a large snake. It was coiled, and its erect tail, which terminated in a string of rattles, proclaimed its species.

"Look out, Ed; it's a rattler!" cried George.

The boys realized the danger, and they decided to take no chances. As they were without weapons, Ed threw a large rock upon the rattler. Although it was crushed and disabled, the snake endeavored to strike him with its venomous fangs; but he rushed

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"I believe they are the only things that live here," he said, as he climbed into his saddle.

For a time the pebbles gave them relief, and then the agony of thirst returned. The heat added to their suffering, and they became faint and giddy from hunger. Then the steers crowded forward eagerly, and a great hope entered the boys' hearts. Perhaps they had found water; the possibility urged them on. The steers clustered about a shallow depression which seemed to be a waterhole.

"Hurrah! We're all right! They've found water!" cried Ed, hoarsely.

The boys drove the steers aside and hurried to the depression. But when they reached it they found it dry and sun-baked. Their disappointment overwhelmed them, and they became sick at heart. Then an idea flashed into George's mind, and he roused himself. It had been suggested by a great wild-eyed steer pawing at the hard-packed earth.

"He has the right idea," cried George,

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They began to search for something with which to dig. Ed rode toward what seemed to be a scattered collection of sharpened rock fragments. He found the whitened bones of a skeleton. It was half buried in the scant soil, but from what he saw Ed believed it had been a deer, or possibly an elk. He was surprised to find it there. He looked about him and saw several others. One was small, and from the skull he identified the bony remains of a fox. There was another with larger, flatter bones, which he thought were those of a steer. Altogether he saw six mute testimonials of death within a half-mile radius of the dry waterhole.

Ed began to think. How had they got there? Why had they all died at that particular spot? The truth suddenly flashed through his mind. Like him they had entered the Bad Lands and lost themselves. Then they had wandered about in search of a way out. In their wanderings they had found the pool, and, urged on by the agony of thirst, they had rushed forward to drink.

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Ed galloped Vic toward the treacherous depression. A shudder passed through him as he saw George stooped over at the bottom of the hole. He was digging with a piece of bone, and he had made rapid progress. The possibility of reaching water seemed to have thrown him into delirium. He worked with a nervous frenzy that threatened soon to exhaust his feeble energy. His eyes were focused on the round, cup-like hollow he had scraped in the dry, powdery soil. He took no notice of Ed, but continued at his task.

"George, it's no use; give it up!" cried Ed.

George raised his head and looked at him in amazement. His face was drawn and streaked with dust and sweat, and his eyes were wild and staring.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, from cracked and swollen lips. "We'll get water here; I've struck darker and cooler soil already. When I'm tired you can take a hand

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strewn with the bones of animals that have drunk at this pool."

George rose unsteadily to his feet and passed his hand across his brow. He threw the bone into the hole he had made, and turned to Ed with a ghastly smile on his face.

"I see it, Ed; I didn't stop to figure it out. Let's go away from here," he said, weakly, as he staggered toward his horse.

They mounted and once more began the weary, random journey. The terrific heat of midday had passed, but it had left them weak and exhausted. Violent pains throbbed through their temples, their vision became faulty and blurred, and their burning throats and dry, swollen tongues made swallowing difficult. The steers exhibited evidences of exhaustion, and a few became rebellious and troublesome. Vic and Skeets behaved like heroes; but they, too, showed signs of collapse.

Never for a moment did the boys think of

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to do that, to stay with them and hold them together until help arrived.

"We've simply got to get out of here before dark," declared Ed, resolutely.

"Ed, I'm afraid our chances are very slim; but I'm game to keep trying," said George.

Another hour passed, and the boys realized the hopelessness of their struggle. It seemed useless to wander farther. They were only exhausting themselves, their horses, and the dumb brutes they were risking their lives to save. They dismounted and leaned wearily against the ponies. The air seemed close and stuffy, and vivid red streaks darted before their eyes. Their strength was failing, and they lost heart.

"We have just one chance," said Ed. "Perhaps Tad or some of his men will find us before it is too late."

"Do you suppose they'll think to look in here?" inquired George.

Ed had never doubted it until that mo-

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that had sustained him through the long, agonizing hours suddenly died, and Ed tottered on the verge of collapse.

The boys had no way of making known their whereabouts. They could not send up a smoke-signal, as there was nothing with which to make a fire. Neither could they shoot, for they had left their revolvers at the cow-camp. There seemed to be no way to attract attention. They could do nothing to hasten their rescue. The steers had ceased bawling, and the silence was unbroken. Ed tried to shout, but his attempt ended in a dry cackle. Having stopped, it seemed as if they had failed. Each read the lines of agony in the other's face, and each kept his misery to himself.

"We may as well wait here until they find us," said Ed.

George started at the proposal. "Until they find us"; the words had an ominous sound. He recalled the bleached bones near the poison trap. The place had claimed

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saw two large birds silently circling over the herd. They shuddered as they realized the significance of their appearance. They or their kind had probably circled over the other doomed creatures at the waterhole. They depended upon the Bad Lands for their food. They would wait for the miserable victims to die, and then they would drop to the grisly feast.

"Let's make one more try," urged George, as he struggled into the saddle.

They moved, but the birds followed them. The sun had gone almost from sight, the day was drawing to a close. Darkness would postpone their rescue until the morrow, and then, perhaps, it would be too late. They dared not think of the night. The steers began to lag, and the ponies required urging. But the boys determined to fight to the end, and they continued toward the eastern border of the Bad Lands. They still believed it to be the shortest way out. A scant three

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roaring in their ears which resembled the sound from a distant waterfall.

"Do you hear it?" asked Ed, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes," replied George. "Let's hurry; I'm choking."

They were trembling with excitement. They tried to hasten the jaded beasts in front of them. A blue haze showed in the distance, and they mistook it for water. They failed to understand the indifference of the steers. Even Vic and Skeets seemed in no hurry to reach it. What was wrong? Were their eyes deceiving them? They turned to each other for the answer.

"Do you see it?" inquired Ed, eagerly.

George nodded his head.

It was there then, they both agreed to it. Nothing else mattered; their agony was forgotten, and a new-found strength buoyed them up. With spur and quirt they urged their exhausted mounts into a faltering canter. They passed the herd; they had forgotten it. On they rode, their staring eyes

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beasts had not already discovered it. Their impatience made them merciless, and they forced their ponies to the breaking-point. But with all their efforts they were unable to shorten the distance. The tantalizing vision was as far away as ever.

Then the cold, stupefying truth confronted them. They were chasing a mirage. Their craving had helped the delusion, and they had given way to it. The bitter disappointment left them dazed and hopeless. They turned their ponies and rode slowly toward the herd. They were able to converse only in whispers.

"It did look like water, didn't it?" said Ed, regretfully.

"The steers knew better," replied George, grimly.

Then they were halted by a new sound. It was faint and far away, and yet it thrilled them. But they doubted it. Perhaps their bewildered senses were again at fault. They

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it could not have been heard ten feet away. But the shots continued, and their hopes revived. They rode in the direction of the sounds. The sun had set, and twilight was gathering; they had little time to waste. Then the signals became faint and indistinct, and the boys stopped in dismay. The searchers were evidently passing them by. They were driven to desperation by the thought.

"They're gone," faltered Ed.

"Wait; perhaps they've ridden behind a butte or some other obstruction which has killed the sound," said George, hopefully.

But the next shots destroyed even this slight hope. They were fainter and farther away. The boys swayed in their saddles; they told themselves it was the end. There seemed no way now to escape their fate.

"It's pretty tough to lose out by such a slight margin," whispered Ed.

At that instant they heard two shots close at hand, and an instant later a long, ringing halloo. They would have mistrusted their

"There are two searching parties; we've heard the distant one; the other is sure to find us!" gasped George.

This time Vic and Skeets required no urging, and of their own accord they hurried toward the sound. As they rounded one of the tomb-like buttes they came face to face with Tad. Behind him was "Skinny," and back of him was the "chuck" wagon and the cook.

"Well, you fellows have sure caused us some worry," cried Tad.

The boys were unable to reply, and the experienced foreman understood their condition at a glance. He and "Skinny" assisted them to the ground. Then they produced canteens and poured the longed-for water into their mouths. It revived them, and they began to smile.

"You're plumb in," said Tad. "But you'll come around in a minute or two."

"Skinny" produced some sandwiches and

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and walked to the drooping ponies. The cook came forward with two pails of water, and Vic and Skeets were relieved of their suffering.

"Why, you were almost out," laughed Tad. "You're within a few miles of the ranch. Climb into the wagon, and tie your ponies on behind, and Jud will take you out. 'Skinny' and I will drive the herd to the plain; there's water there. We'll let them feed and rest, and will bring them in to-morrow."

The boys said they were willing to stay with the herd, but Tad would not hear of it. He told them food, water, and a comfortable bed awaited them at the ranch-house. The temptation was too strong, and they yielded.

They spent two days at the Twin Circle Ranch, to rest themselves and their horses. The boys seemed little the worse for their experience, and Tad and "Skinny" brought in the herd without losing a steer. All hands rejoiced at the lucky ending to the adventure.

The boys gradually got the full details of the stampede. The main body of steers had

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XVII

IN NATURE'S WONDERLAND

TWO days later they arrived at the Lazy Y, and Dick and Armstrong gave them a hearty welcome. The latter inquired about the trip, and the boys were amused at the simple, quiet way in which Tad made light of the difficulties.

"Yes, they were some cantankerous one night, but it didn't amount to much. Come to think of it, though, Ed and George did get plumb thirsty before it was all over," said Tad, in reply to a question about the conduct of the herd.

Then the boys were forced to tell of their unpleasant adventure. They told it simply and modestly; but Dick and the ranchman

from Yellowstone Park; how would you like to take a look at it?"

The boys instantly welcomed the opportunity.

"It is just what we intended to propose," laughed Ed.

"All right, we'll pull out to-morrow."

Armstrong wished them to lengthen their stay; but Dick laughed and said he thought they had remained long enough. He told him there were still many places he wished to take the boys to before their vacation came to an end.

Later they went to the bunk-house to say good-by to the cowboys who had been with them on the drive. They had formed a strong friendship for these big-hearted, courageous men of the plains, and they were sorry to leave them.

"Tad, you've given us a splendid time, and we wish to thank you; especially for getting us out of the Bad Lands," said Ed, extending his hand.

"Don't speak about that part of it; you'd probably have got out anyway," said Tad.

and join the outfit—you're qualified now, you know."

The boys were much pleased with the compliment.

"Good-by," said "Red. "Any time you amble this way again, we'll be sure glad to see you."

"Well, as old Squire Hopkins would say, 'there's no misery like the misery of partin'.' Good-by and good-luck, boys," said "Arizona."

"For once that Texas man has really said something," declared "Skinny," in his slow drawl. "I'm plumb sorry you're goin'. Look us up again."

Early the next morning they left the ranch. The pack-horses were rested and eager for the trail, and they made good time. At noon they stopped beside a likely-looking stream, and the boys caught some fine trout. Then they came to a long, level stretch of sage-grown plain. They saw antelope and a few mule-deer, and had great sport teasing a badger that growled at them from the en-

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The following afternoon they arrived at Gardiner, and Dick called their attention to the great lava arch at the entrance to the Park. The alfalfa-plain in front of the town was dotted with antelope, which had come to feed. In the fall, elk, deer, and sometimes mountain-sheep came there to eat at the hay-stacks. Coyotes, too, ventured boldly upon the reservation, and committed murderous depredations.

"They sneak down at night from the hills, and make their attack on young fawns, and on the old and the weak," he told the boys.

The frontier town gave the lads another opportunity to write home. They left the horses at the livery barn and went to the hotel. After supper Ed replenished his supply of films, for Dick said there would be many chances to use the camera in the Park.

"We'll have to stop at the scout's office to register and have our weapons sealed," said Dick, as they started into the Park the next morning. "They keep a sharp watch on everybody who goes through without a guide.

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They entered the scout station to comply with the requirements. Dick knew the young fellow on duty, and introduced the boys. After he had written their names in his book, the scout asked for their weapons. He fastened a wire about the hammer and trigger of each, and locked it with a government seal.

"Now you're at the mercy of the grizzlies," he laughed, as he returned their firearms. "They'll free them when you go out at Tower Falls."

When they had left him and resumed their journey the boys asked the reason for such precautions. To them it seemed like a needless display of "red-tape." But Dick soon enlightened them.

"You see, all kinds of people go through here—good, bad, and indifferent. Some are all right and don't require watching, but others would cause no end of trouble if they thought they could escape. The careless ones might start a forest fire, which might do millions of dollars' worth of damage, and

brought back to pay for their crime. And it's the same way about weapons. It would be plumb easy for a fellow anxious to kill a bear to shoot one and say it had attacked him; or a party of game-butchers might sneak in and kill a bunch of elk or deer, and hustle them out over the boundary. Sealing guns, and making it a misdemeanor to be found with them unsealed, lessens the danger."

"What chumps we were not to have thought of that," laughed Ed.

"There are lots of people who don't think of such things, and a few others that simply won't think of them," said Dick.

They had not gone far before he turned from the main road and followed a trail.

"We're compelled to do this during the tourist season," he told them. "There are just a few places where pack-horses are not allowed on the main road. But this brings us out at the same place. We'll stop at Mammoth Hot Springs, and then we'll go on eight miles beyond and camp for the night."

The boys turned many times to look back

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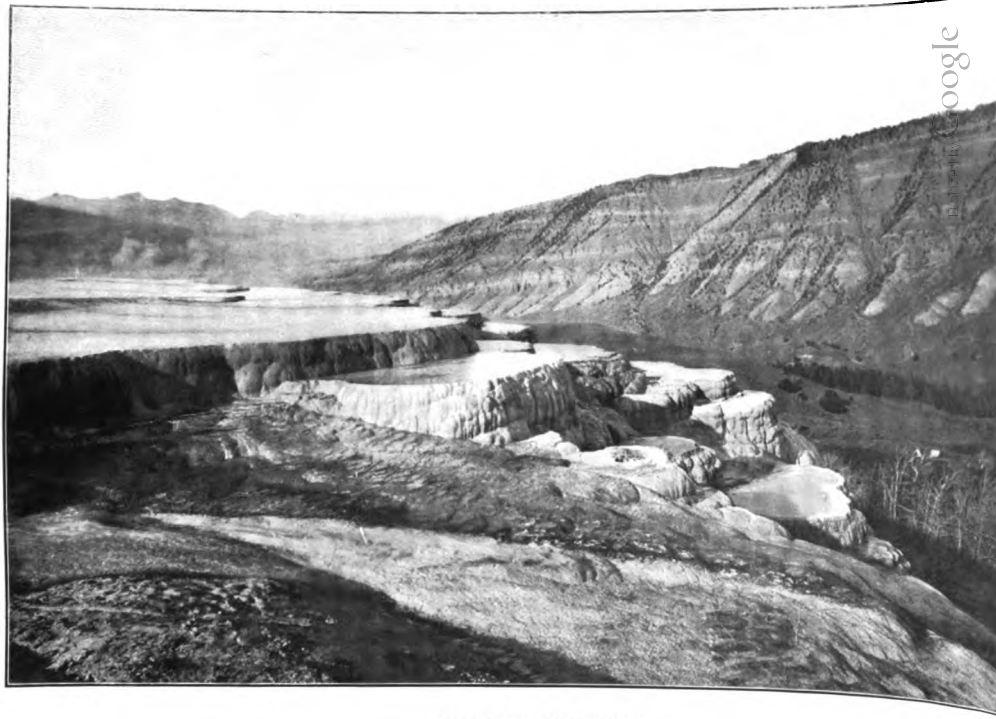

MAMMOTH HOT SPRINGS

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an inviting-looking trout-stream. But Dick said there was better fishing farther on.

"We've crossed the state line, and now we're in Wyoming," said Dick.

Shortly afterward they came to the Mammoth Hot Springs. They found them at one end of a level, irrigated plateau, on which were a large hotel, a military barracks, and the administration buildings of the Park. They arranged to leave the horses at the hotel barn, and started off to investigate.

"Here's the first thing to look at," cried Dick.

He showed them a rounded cone more than thirty feet high. It stood isolated and alone, like some grim veteran of the past.

"It's an extinct geyser, and because of its shape they call it Liberty Cap," Dick explained. "Over yonder is another, smaller one, called the Giant's Thumb."

Then he took them to the foot of Terrace Mountain. They followed a winding path to the summit and found themselves in a veri-

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were the hottest; others were green and blue and beautiful shades of amber. These pools were on top of the terraces, and the water flowed down over a succession of gaudily colored steps, and formed a weird, magical fountain.

Each terrace was composed of a series of wide, shallow basins of calcareous origin, set one upon the other. Boiling water from the pools flowed over the face of them and gave them their colors. Each terrace was named, and each was different from its neighbor.

The boys were enchanted. They had never dreamed of such gorgeous combinations of colors. They saw the orange-tinted Minerva Terrace, with its pools of azure blue; the more gaudy Jupiter Terrace, with its vivid streaks of white and yellow and pink and brown, and its emerald pool at the top; the wonderful steaming Cleopatra Terrace, with its deep yellows, its delicate lavenders, and its browns and reds. There were many others equally fine, and they were unable to choose a favorite.

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silver-gray rocks. The road had been made through the midst of them, and the dead trees and queer volcano-looking formations made the drive weird and uncanny. The place reminded the boys of the Bad Lands, and they were not sorry to leave it and return for the pack-horses.

Early in the afternoon they came to a place near a spring which Dick had selected for the first night's camp. They soon had the horses unpacked and the tent erected. While they were putting things in shape four mule-deer came from the woods to look them over. They seemed absolutely fearless, and Ed took several pictures before they finally wandered away.

"That shows what protection will do," said Dick.

"Isn't it splendid!" said George, enthusiastically.

That night a thieving coyote invaded their camp and tried to make away with some of their provisions. Dick hurled the ax at it, and from the yelp that followed the boys

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black obsidian, or volcanic glass. Dick said the Indians used to go to it for material for arrow-heads and knives. Near it was a stream that had been dammed by beavers. Several lodges could be seen from the road, and the boys watched for some time, hoping to get a picture. But the wary animals refused to show themselves, and after they had photographed some gnawed stumps the lads moved on.

"This must have been a great place for Indians," said Ed.

"No; they didn't care much about staying in the Park. The geysers and hot springs had them buffaloed. They thought it was the home of evil spirits," laughed Dick.

After lunch they came in sight of Norris Geyser Basin. Numerous columns of steam rose from its hot pools and geysers. Dick said it was unique in possessing the only steam geysers in the Park.

"In some places the crust of the earth is

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the ground seemed hollow and thin. It was as if the earth were burning itself out beneath their feet. Fountains of hot water shot into the air on all sides of them, great cavernous holes emitted roaring blasts of steam, and the whole place seemed scorched and burned to a cinder.

"That is the Black Growler," said Dick, as the boys turned to look at a blackened orifice from which steam escaped with a loud, ominous rumbling.

They were much interested in the geysers, with their great, volcano-like eruptions of hot water and steam. These "played" at more or less frequent intervals; the most active was a handsome one called the Constant.

At the end of two hours they departed for the next show place, Lower Geyser Basin. They made camp along the Gibbon River. From a wide, mountain-bordered park it entered a deep, winding, palisaded cañon, and near its white-crested cascades Dick and

thieves to-night?" laughed Ed, as the shadows gathered.

"We're getting pretty well along toward the bear country," said Dick.

Somehow the idea of driving off marauding grizzlies by throwing the camp ax did not appeal to the boys. They looked at the wires which locked their rifles, and reflected on what might happen if a particularly large bear should venture to raid their larder. But the night passed without incident.

The next day they continued along the Gibbon River, until they came to the Firehole River. They found it a larger stream, with a series of imposing rapids and cascades. Its waters were unusually clear, and the boys were interested in the many queer and beautiful vegetable growths seen in their depths. They caught many trout in this stream, and found them active and gamy.

Then they came to Lower Geyser Basin. Its geysers were larger than those at Norris. In addition to the geysers they saw the mammoth "Paint Pots," great caldrons of hot,

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The earth about the "Paint Pots" was baked and cracked from the fierce internal heat that found an outlet through these sputtering pools of mushy clay. They were wonderful and fascinating phenomena, and the boys were delighted with them.

Then Dick took them to Firehole Lake. They gazed into its clear depths and saw what seemed to be jets of blue flame issuing from black, cavernous holes. It was an uncanny spectacle, and the boys began to understand why the Indians had shunned the Park.

Later they saw the splendid eruption of Great Fountain, which had the distinction of being coneless. They also visited Big Blue Spring, a beautiful ultramarine pool of hot water.

That night they went up behind the hotel to see the bears. There were four black bears feeding at the rubbish-pile. Then an old mother bear and her cubs appeared. She walked directly to the largest bear, which had taken possession of the refuse-heap, and

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"Those fellows are not hankering to mix it with an old she-bear with cubs," said Dick. "There's nothing worse on four legs, when it comes to a rough-and-tumble fight."

The bears suddenly raised their heads and looked apprehensively toward the top of a small hill. A good-sized grizzly was just coming over the brow of it. The four "unattached" bears instantly took to their heels. The mother bear looked up to learn the reason for their hurried departure. When she saw the grizzly she, too, hurried away, driving her cubs before her.

"He's the king of the Park," said Dick.

The grizzly came slowly down the trail, pausing every few feet to look at the little group of tourists who had gathered at a safe distance from his feeding-ground. While he was busy with his meal the mother and her cubs peeped over the top of the hill. The grizzly raised his head and they hastily withdrew.

It was growing dark, and Dick and the boys returned to camp. They fully expected a visit from bears before daylight. But as

"To-day we'll go to the real home of the geysers," he said, as the boys appeared. "Wait until you see Old Faithful. But there are lots of things to see before we get there."

After about four miles of travel they turned aside into Midway Geyser Basin. Here they saw Prismatic Lake, a wonderfully beautiful hot pool, which Dick said was the largest in the world. It was more than two acres in extent, and the water was of a rich amber color, which tinted with gold the splendid aquatic growths in its depths. A short distance away they found Turquoise Spring, another hot pool about half the size of Prismatic Lake. Then they saw the gaily colored Excelsior Geyser; Dick said it had not been in eruption for many years.

They left this interesting spot and continued toward still greater wonders. They stopped at Biscuit Basin, and saw some round, biscuit-like formations made by the silica in the hot water.

"Now I'll show you something pretty slick," Dick promised them.

posit they saw an irregularly round steaming pool, shaped much like the flower for which it was named. The water was of various shades of blue, lighter near the edges, and almost black in the center. The pool was about twenty feet in diameter, and a great yawning funnel led from the bottom of it into the bowels of the earth.

"Well, what about it?" laughed Dick, after they had gazed at it for some moments.

"It is beautiful," said George.

Then they entered the home of the geysers. The sight was bewildering, for wherever they looked they saw great jets of hot water shooting high into the air. As they entered the basin the Riverside Geyser began to play. It was close to the Firehole River, and it threw a stream of water which bridged the river with a graceful arch almost a hundred feet high. As if to enhance the effect, the sun made a splendid rainbow in the mist.

"We were just in time for that. It only

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ly wonderful. They wandered about from one to another, exclaiming with delight each time a new one burst forth.

"Now we'll see the king of them all," cried Dick, as he led them toward Old Faithful.

It began to "play" as they approached, and when it had reached its height they saw a column of water climb a hundred and fifty feet into the air. It continued more than five minutes, and the boys snapped several pictures. Dick told them this geyser "played" at intervals of sixty-five minutes, day and night.

"It must expel a great amount of water in a day," said Ed.

"More than a million gallons at every eruption," Dick assured them.

At the farther end of this wonderful valley of geysers they found a varied collection of hot pools and springs. They were particularly charmed with Emerald Spring, a brilliant green hot-water pool, shaped something like the Morning Glory Spring. They found much to admire, too, in Sunset Lake, a beau-

round, bowl-like formation tinted much like the terraces at Mammoth Hot Springs, aroused their keenest enthusiasm. The Sponge was another gaudily colored formation of similar design, which came in for a generous share of their praise. Then they found the Tea Kettle, a shallow calcareous formation whose pool of bubbling water gave off puffs of steam like those from a tea-kettle. There were many others to keep them interested, and the day had passed before they realized it.

Dick told them the basin was a noted place for bears, and early in the evening they went to see them. At the hotel refuse-pile they saw eight large grizzlies. One had a tin can on one of its front feet. It had pushed its paw in to withdraw some titbit, and had been unable to pull it out.

Early the next day they departed for Yellowstone Lake. The road led them through a splendid stretch of forest, and before they had gone far they had the sport of chasing a small black bear.

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A few miles farther on they crossed the Continental Divide. Dick explained that it was an irregular mountain-line separating the drainage, and distributing part of it to the Atlantic through the Yellowstone and Madison rivers, and the balance to the Pacific through the Snake River. Having studied it in their geographies during their school-days, the boys were particularly pleased at the opportunity to cross it. They were astounded to find a small lily-choked pond nestled at the exact spot, more than eight thousand feet above the level of the sea. A few miles beyond they again crossed the Divide at Shoshone Point. They stopped there to view the wonderful panorama of mountains and forest spread out before them.

At midday they arrived at the west arm of Yellowstone Lake. They found some very gaudy "Paint Pots," numerous hot pools, and several small geysers. But what particularly interested them was the Fishing Cone, a round, mound-like formation which rose

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the spring. The boys determined to try it, and at the end of a half-hour they both had accomplished the feat.

After lunch they rode toward the northern end of the lake. The view from the road was magnificent. They found this twenty-mile lake a notable body of water. Dick said it was one of the highest navigable lakes in the world, at an altitude of more than seventy-seven hundred feet. Its heavily wooded shores were jutting and irregular, numerous islands dotted its surface, and it was walled in by wooded hills and great towering mountains. On the east the giant Tetons reared their snow-clad peaks into the clouds, and like a great barricade the rugged Absaroka Range extended along the horizon. Dick said all sorts of game lived in its rock-bound fastnesses.

"We'll get up into some of it before we return to the cabin," he promised them.

That night they had their first experience with Park bears. The boys were awakened by something prowling about the tent. They

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most raised their hair. Then he began to laugh.

"That will frighten him most as bad as it frightened you."

"Frighten whom?" asked Ed.

"Why, the nosy old bear that's been snoopin' around here for the past hour or more. I got up and drove him away once; if he comes back it will be your turn to do it."

The yell seemed to have had the desired effect, for they heard nothing more from the unseen prowler. They were too drowsy to continue the watch, and, convinced that the bear had gone, they went to sleep.

"It's back again," whispered George, as he awakened Ed a short time afterward.

Once more they heard the sound which had first aroused them. They believed that Dick was awake and waiting to see what they would do. He had put them to the test, and they determined to prove their nerve. Just what sort of dispositions the Park bears had they did not know, but they were willing to take a chance.

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"Come on, it's up to us this time," said

out into the night. It was inky black, and they could not have seen the bear had it been within a yard of them. They listened, but to no avail; the stillness was unbroken.

"Don't flash the light until we hear him," advised Ed.

But at that instant they heard the bear at the side of the tent. They tiptoed around there and pointed the light in the direction of the sound. In the glare of yellow light they saw a large brown bear regarding them curiously. It blinked its eyes and uttered an indifferent "woof." Then it turned toward the woods. Encouraged by its apparent peacefulness, Ed threw a stone at it. It wheeled and began to growl.

"Take it easy, old man," warned George. "Remember we're unarmed."

But the bear seemed quite willing to forgive the affront to its dignity, and, blinded by the dazzling glare from the lamp, it lost its nerve and fled. The boys followed it a short

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this time," said Dick, as they entered the tent; and from the way he said it they knew he was satisfied with them.

The following day they resumed their journey toward the Grand Cañon. Their route extended through picturesque Hayden Valley and along the noble Yellowstone. In passing through this charming spot they saw numerous bands of elk and several colonies of pelicans.

Half-way to the cañon they came to Mud Geyser. Dick called it a real volcano, and it gave every indication to warrant the assertion. An almost constant eruption of brown liquid mud and roily hot water came from its smoking black crater. At such times it gave forth a sulphurous odor, and the whole effect was weird and unnatural.

A short distance beyond it they turned from the road to see the Gothic Grotto, a small, tunnel-like entrance into the hillside. It looked like a dainty sculptured archway to

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Percé braves across the Yellowstone, when they were pursued by government troops in the war of 1877."

Early in the afternoon they reached the first or Upper Falls of the Yellowstone. While Dick remained with the horses the boys left the road and descended a stairway to an observation platform. They saw the river fall more than a hundred feet to a rocky basin. Then, recovering from the shock, it rushed away between steep, wooded banks to take a still greater drop.

At that spot the boys again stood in silent awe as they looked upon the great tower of falling water. They were deafened by its roar and wet with its spray. Like an enormous green serpent it glided over the edge of a precipice three hundred feet above them. Straight down it fell and dashed itself into fragments on the rocks. Its power was vouched for by the cañon beyond. There for unknown centuries it had done its work. Like a pioneer it had blazed the trail, and the elements had followed in its wake and completed the transformation. And it was still

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rock. It was sweeping away the accumulation of ages and exposing the secrets of the universe.

When the boys saw the cañon they were overwhelmed. All they had seen before was commonplace compared to it. They looked into a wonderful gorge that was more than a thousand feet deep. Its sides were a riot of color. Reds, browns, yellows, whites, purples, and combinations of all of them transformed it into a fairyland. It was formed of great walls of rock, long, precipitous reaches of clay and sand, and groups of pulpit-like pinnacles. It narrowed to a keel-edge at the bottom, and there, like a winding green lane, the Yellowstone took its way. Ospreys flew to their nests on the crags or soared about the chasm on motionless wings. Deer trails dotted the impossible-looking inclines.

"There are no words big enough to describe it," said Ed, reverently.

They remained to watch the sunset shadows clothe it with the purple robe of evening. But even the misty twilight could not subdue its savage grandeur, and they left it softened but still vivid. Once the sun had

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The following day they left it and rode to the scout station at Tower Falls. They reported to the sergeant in charge. He was a bronzed young giant, jovial and hospitable. Dick gave him an itinerary of the remainder of their journey.

"So you're goin' up Slough Creek way, eh? Well, you'll be inside the Park line for a day or two, so I can't very well unseal your guns. I'll leave it to you to do when you cross the line. By the way, keep an eye peeled for an outlaw buffalo. Sampson, the biggest and meanest bull of the herd, escaped last night."

They left the station and followed a game-trail through the center of a wide, plain-like basin between parallel mountain ranges. Far ahead of them they saw great snow-capped peaks, and Dick said they would have to climb them to reach his cabin. They made camp beside Slough Creek, and it furnished them with trout for supper.

"Wouldn't it be great if we should come across the outlaw buffalo," said Ed, as they sat about the fire.

XVIII

THE OUTLAW BUFFALO

AFTER breakfast they continued along the creek. They had gone about a mile when Dick pointed to a mottled object lying on the plain. The boys saw at once that it was an antelope. They expected to see it jump to its feet and hurry away. But it remained motionless, and they were puzzled.

"Is it dead?" inquired George.

"It may be sick," said Dick.

As it appeared to be lifeless, the boys dismounted and approached it. Ed prepared the camera as a precaution, for he determined to have a picture if the antelope came to life. But to all appearances it was dead, and they hurried forward to learn the cause of its death.

"It may have been killed by coyotes," Ed suggested.

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"Perhaps it died of old age," said George.

An instant later the "dead" antelope was on its feet. For a moment it confronted them and stamped angrily, and they believed it intended to charge. It gave them a splendid opportunity for a snap-shot, and Ed made the most of it. Then it wheeled and bounded away.

"That old rogue was asleep," laughed Ed, as he wound off the film.

"He must have thought he was dreaming when he awakened and saw us," laughed George.

"Did you notice the disk of white hairs on his rump?"

"Yes; wasn't it odd? It made an easy bull's-eye."

Dick told them it was a danger-signal which was "flashed" by the animal erecting the long, yellowish-white hairs. He said it was the way antelopes warn one another of peril.

"I reckon it's what you might call an original form of wireless telegraphy," he laughed.

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and gained cover without being discovered. But their caution did no good, for the beaver dived and failed to reappear.

"He probably has a burrow beneath that overhanging bank," said Ed.

"Either that, or he has come up somewhere on the other side of that point."

They stole carefully along the shore, but they saw nothing of the beaver. After watching for several minutes longer they returned to the ponies.

At noon they halted at the head of a shallow ravine, and Dick said it was there they would turn from the plain. He showed them a blazed trail which led to a ranger's winter cabin four or five miles beyond. Dick planned to spend the night there.

"But before you leave the plain I wish you to try a pool about three miles farther up the brook. We'll eat lunch here, and then I'll take the pack-horses and go up the draw to the cabin. After you've had all the fishing you want, come back and follow this trail; you'll find supper at the end of it," said Dick.

He told them the exact location of the pool,

fixed in their minds, the boys set out to find it. The game-trail led them directly to the spot, and they dismounted and tied Vic and Skeets in a grove of small trees. Then they put their rods in order, and hurried to the stream. It formed a series of pools, and they decided to separate, so they would not interfere with each other.

"I have a whopper!" cried George, a few moments after they had begun to fish. "Say, wouldn't that make you sick? I've lost him."

"Never mind. There are many more; I've already landed two beauties," Ed replied, encouragingly.

Ed fished up-stream, and George followed the current; within an hour they were more than a mile apart. Each had splendid luck, for the fish were unsophisticated and ravenous, and at the end of the second hour their heavy creels warned them that it was time to quit. In fact, George had already turned

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ing creature in the distance as the outlaw buffalo. George became much excited. He looked for a hiding-place. There was nothing but the stream-bank. Before he could take advantage of it the buffalo raised its head and saw him. For several minutes it stood and looked at him, and he remained as motionless as a statue. Then, unable to satisfy its curiosity at the distance, the buffalo began to advance.

George had not expected this manœuver, and he was undecided as to what his next move should be. He was entirely unfamiliar with the habits of buffaloes, but from what the scout had told him he believed this one might charge. The ponies were a mile away, and Ed was even farther. There was nothing to give him shelter, for the plain was bare and treeless. As yet there was a safe distance between him and the buffalo, and he wished to maintain it until he reached the ponies and warned Ed. Tad had told him steers would often charge an unmounted man. He wondered if the same thing was true of buffaloes. With each step of the great bull

vance. He began to walk along the bank, waving his hat as he went.

The buffalo stopped short, and George felt somewhat relieved. But the next instant he quickened his pace, for its actions implied an attack. It pawed the ground, shook its head, and rumbled threateningly. Then it trotted a few paces toward him, and George stopped and faced it. Again it halted and began to bluster.

The trees which hid the horses seemed a long way off, and even with his lead George doubted his ability to beat the buffalo to them. But each moment he hesitated he was losing some of his advantage, for the buffalo was steadily shortening the distance between them.

George slipped the heavy basket of trout from his shoulder and prepared for the race. He started away at a slow trot, and for several yards he was unpursued. Then the buffalo seemed to realize what was happening. It "rolled" its tail above its back, lowered its head, and started after him. George glanced

college had taught him how to run a race, and he used his head as well as his feet. He knew the advantage of a handicap, and he proceeded to make the most of his lead. But he soon discovered the difference between running on a smooth, well-cared-for oval and the rough, uneven surface of a blistering plain. However, the incentive to win this race was far stronger than any he had ever had before, and he clenched his teeth and set himself to the task.

But before he had gone a quarter of the distance he realized that he was running too fast. He told himself it would be impossible to go the route at such a pace. A glance backward encouraged him, for he saw that he had lost little of his lead. He shaved the merest fraction from the pace, but it was too much; the buffalo cut the distance almost in half, and George again sprinted forward at top speed. He steeled himself for a grilling race; it was to be a "home-stretch run" all the way. He focused his eyes on the little

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ground. A great boulder showed a short way to one side, and, feeling his strength deserting him, George turned toward it. Urged on by desperation, he somehow gained a foothold and climbed to the top. Then, completely "winded," he fell forward on his face.

When he had somewhat recovered he looked about him and saw the enraged buffalo pawing a great circle in the plain. The top of the boulder was far enough from the ground to give him safety, and George had nothing to fear. He believed the vicious brute would exhaust its wrath and leave him. But he was unwilling that it should escape, for he had planned to return it to captivity. But how? That was a question he could not answer.

He heard a shout and looked toward the trees. Ed appeared with the horses. George stood up and called, and when he had attracted his attention he pointed to the buffalo. Ed evidently surmised danger of some sort

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"I know it," replied Ed. "I'll get him to chase me, and after I coax him a safe distance away I'll race back with the horses."

But when the buffalo heard human voices and saw the horses it seemed to suspect a trap. To the amazement of the boys, instead of charging Ed, it made off at top speed across the plain. Its object seemed to be to reach the timber along the base of the foothills.

George lost no time in sliding from the boulder and in climbing into the saddle. Then he and Ed set out to overtake the outlaw. It was an easy task, for the buffalo was no match for Vic and Skeets. As they drew near it wheeled and charged them, and they were obliged to ride out of its way.

"Don't let him get into the timber!" cried George, as the buffalo again started across the plain.

"How can we prevent him?" inquired Ed.

"Get in front of him."

They urged the ponies and passed at a safe

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not to be so easily turned aside, and despite their bold front it continued on its course. Again they were obliged to ride out of its way.

"We must stop him!" shouted George, excitedly.

But, as they were without ropes or weapons, there seemed to be no way of turning the buffalo. Whenever they rode close to it, it turned and charged. Then, having repulsed them, it resumed its flight.

George suddenly had an idea. He stopped Skeets and filled his pockets with stones. As he came up with the buffalo he began to throw them at its head. His aim was good, and most of the stones hit the mark, and the bull gave way before the attack. Finding the scheme a success, the boys repeated the experiment, and, to their delight, the buffalo turned around and ran back toward the stream.

"Let's slow down, and he may stop," proposed George.

But the buffalo felt itself in a trap, and seemed determined to work its way out. As it showed no inclination to slacken the pace,

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buffalo ran directly down the game-trail, toward the head of the ravine where they had lunched. The boys were delighted, for if they could hold him to his course they might drive him to the scout station.

"Don't hurry him too much," advised George. "He may be going back to the range."

"There's not much chance of that," Ed assured him.

"Talk about the old-time buffalo-hunts!"

"This is the real thing, isn't it?"

For a mile or more the buffalo kept to the game-trail. Then it suddenly changed its mind and made another break for the timber. Again the boys rode beside it and began their attack with rocks. But this time they were unable to turn the bull from its course.

They were in despair when three horsemen galloped from the line of trees. Whooping wildly, they rode directly toward the buffalo. As they neared it they drew revolvers and began to shoot. Thoroughly surprised, the

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"We're much obliged to you fellows for rounding up old Sampson," said one of the horsemen. "We were looking through the parks up along the sides of the foothills. We saw you some time ago."

"How will you get him back to the corral?" asked George.

"Oh, that's easy enough; we'll just keep him runnin' straight ahead, and if he tries to break out we'll drive him back by shootin' blanks in his face."

The buffalo seemed to realize that all further effort to prolong his freedom was useless. It galloped steadily along with its head down and its wicked, bloodshot eyes turned furtively to watch the nearest horseman.

As he cantered behind the captive George suddenly thought about his basket of fish. During the exciting adventure with the bull it had entirely passed from his mind.

"Say, Ed, I've left my creel and my catch back there where I first saw the buffalo. I'll have to return."

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"I'll go with you."

The boys allowed them to amble slowly along, so they might cool off. George had no trouble in locating the spot where he had dropped the fish-basket, and they recovered it and rode toward the ravine.

When they reached it and turned from the plain the sun had set. The trail took them through a splendid forest of evergreens, and they kept a constant lookout for game. Long before they came in sight of the cabin they heard Dick's ringing ax-strokes. Then, as they drew nearer they smelled the smoke from his fire. It made them hurry, for they had worked up wonderful appetites. A short time afterward they emerged into a sheltered little park-like basin, and at the opposite side of it they saw the tiny cabin. Dick came to the door and waved to them, and they answered his greeting with a shout.

"I was afraid you might be caught by darkness," he said, as they rode up. "Give me your fish, and I'll flop a few of them into the

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XIX

WITH THE PROSPECTORS

THE following day's journey brought them again to the mountains. It took them through a region of splendid timber and rushing streams, and the boys felt thoroughly at home. Old Ben and Maine had instilled a love for the wilderness deep in their hearts, and, like all woodsmen, they preferred the forest to the plain.

"It's good to smell the pines again, isn't it?" said Ed.

"You bet," agreed George.

"Here, too," laughed Dick. "A little tinge of sage and a few lungfuls of dust don't hurt anybody; but to be downright contented I've got to hear the wind soughin' through the tree-tops and see the sun gildin' the granite peaks."

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gone that way, for there were horse tracks in the soft spots.

"Somebody has gone through here," said Ed.

"Yes, a good many somebodies," laughed Dick. "Prospectors, I reckon. There's a tip going around that these mountains carry ore. I shouldn't be surprised if we find quite a camp of sour-doughs when we reach the plateau."

"What are sour-doughs?" inquired George.

"Sour-doughs are veterans of the gold trail, men who've swung a pick and shaken a gold-pan till they're unfit to do anything else; men with the wander-fever, who've dreamed dreams and tried to make them come true; men who've cut their way into Nature's rock treasure-chests and tunneled deep into her underground vaults; men who've turned rivers from their courses and leveled mountains; men who've heard the roar of the slide and the crash of the cave-in; men who've faced the desert heat and the moun-

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follow. But I reckon the best way to sum up a sour-dough is to call him a man," said Dick.

"They're prospectors, then," said Ed.

"Yes."

The boys continued silent; they were lost in thought. Dick's enthusiastic eulogy of these men had deeply impressed them. A heroic figure took form in their minds. They placed him in line with the trapper and the cowboy and the lumber-jack. He completed an invincible quartet. All four were dominated by the same restless spirit of adventure. It was such men who had made civilization possible.

"I shall be glad to meet them," said George.

"I reckon you'll find them square," Dick assured him.

In the afternoon they began to climb, and at the end of several hours they came to the plateau. It was wide and level and rimmed by mountains. A stream divided it through the center. The boys saw a half-dozen tents and two log cabins, the latter in course of

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mountain-sides they heard the click of hand-drills as the steel was pounded into the solid rock.

"Every one appears to be busy," said Ed, as they halted to survey the scene.

"In this business it's 'make hay while the sun shines,' or while the grub holds out, which is one and the same thing," laughed Dick.

They had not been there long before the workers saw them and stopped to "look them over." A red-shirted man climbed from the stream and approached them.

"Howdy, strangers," he said, as he came within speaking distance.

"Howdy," said Dick.

"Allowin' to stake?" he inquired.

"No; we're just passing through on our way to Cut-off," Dick explained.

"Well, then you won't be disappointed to hear that this basin is staked to the last inch. We're so close together a man can go around his boundaries arm in arm with his neighbor," he laughed.

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"I reckon there'll be no objection if we lay up here for the night," said Dick.

"We'd be plumb put out if you passed us by," declared the hospitable stranger. "And then it's likely you may know some of the boys. Make yourselves at home, and when we quit work we'll come over and get acquainted."

Having learned their mission, he went back to "the diggings" to tell his companions, and Dick looked about for a camp-site. He chose a little knoll near the stream, and the boys helped him unpack the horses and put up the tent.

As they were cooking supper several prospectors came to pay them a visit. Among them was a great broad-shouldered man with a coarse, black beard.

"It's 'Lucky Jim' Jackson, as sure as you're born," cried Dick, as he hurried to meet him.

"Dick, I'm sure glad to see you," said the prospector, extending his hand.

"'Lucky,' you're a sight for sore eyes,"

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They sat down and lighted their pipes, and Ed and George had an opportunity to study them. They were rugged men, heavier and more powerful-looking than the cowboys, but slower and less agile in their movements. They differed, too, from the lumber-jacks, and the boys were compelled to put them in a class by themselves.

"When you've finished eating, come over and join us," invited "Lucky," as he and his companions answered the "grub-call" of their mates.

"We sure will," said Dick.

"How did he get the nickname 'Lucky'?" inquired George, as soon as they were out of hearing.

"Because he's had more narrow escapes, found more 'pay dirt,' and sold more prospects than any other man in the state," declared Dick.

"Then he must be rich," said Ed.

"He should be, but he's not. Like most prospectors, he's a poor business man. He sold good claims for a tenth of their value

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"Well, he's sure had his share of adventures," laughed Dick. "Twice he's run from his cabin just before a landslide buried it from sight; he's been dug out of a cave-in; he's the sole survivor of a little party that went prospecting in the Bad Lands and got mixed up with the Indians; and another time he broke his leg and crawled five miles through a mountain blizzard before his pardner found him."

"I should think he would be ready to quit the game," said George.

"He's the kind that never quits; he'll just naturally see it to a finish."

After supper they went to return "Lucky's" visit. They found most of the prospectors gathered about the camp-fire. Place was made for them, and they took seats in the circle. Beside them sat the man who had first addressed them, and they learned that he was Jeff Handsell, the "pardner" of "Lucky."

"Dick, you've just arrived at the right

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with a drillin' contest; Charley Smith and his pardner have challenged Jeff and me. We want an outsider for judge; you'll take the job, won't you?"

"Of course I will," agreed Dick. "That is, if the boys allow I'm qualified."

"We'll allow that," laughed several, whom Dick knew.

They spent a pleasant evening at the camp-fire, and the boys were sorry when the time came to return to the tent. They had found much to interest them in the talk of these toil-hardened men of the gold-fields, and the time had passed all too quickly.

"I'll bet we'll see some sport to-morrow," said Ed, as he rolled himself in his blanket.

"I hope 'Lucky' and Jeff win the drilling contest," replied George.

The next morning they were awakened by a loud explosion. They threw off their blankets and hurried outside. The entire camp had formed in line to pay their respects to Jeff. Some one had fired a half-can of

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boys entered heartily into the fun, and took their places in line with the others. Then the procession moved toward "Lucky's" tent.

"What in tarnation—" began "Lucky," as he saw them coming. Then he clapped his hand across his mouth and ran to get in line.

A moment later Jeff appeared and collided with the head of the procession. For an instant he looked at them in wide-eyed amazement; then the significance of it dawned upon him, and he began to grin foolishly. Thoroughly embarrassed by the show of affection, he started into the tent, but the powerful arm of the standard-bearer held him back.

"Don't stampede, Jeff; it's nothin' to be ashamed of; better men than you have had a birthday," laughed the giant.

They crowded about him and overwhelmed him with congratulations and good wishes. A lot of good-natured banter, too, went around at his expense. Then the spokesman stepped forward and presented him with a pres-

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"Speech, speech!" cried the celebrators.

"Yes, let's hear words of wisdom from the ancient," laughed "Lucky."

"Boys, I'm sure thankful for your good wishes on this sad and solemn occasion," began Jeff, "and I'll take this opportunity to call my friend 'Lucky' for his words regardin' ancients. My old father used to say, 'You're as old as you feel and half as old as you look.' That lets me into the teethin' class. But some one has said, 'Actions speak louder than words,' and I'm plumb hungry, so let's eat breakfast."

After breakfast Dick showed the boys over the camp. First they went to the brook and watched the men panning. Dick had taught them the operation in Catamount Cañon, and the boys realized how awkward their efforts had been as they watched the skilled operations of these men.

"How is it running?" inquired Dick.

"Just about makin' wages; but we're not down far enough for the real pay dirt," the

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"working" a ravine, and had diverted a stream of water to wash it. The stream had been dammed farther up, and then a long, shallow ditch, or canal, had been dug to bring the water to the head of the ravine. There it was turned free to flow down over the sides and carry the loose earth to the bottom, where another stream washed it through the sluice-boxes. Dick said the method was known as "ground-sluicing," or "booming." The boys realized the immense amount of toil that had been necessary to carry it through.

As the prospectors were adding two new lengths to the sluice, the boys had an opportunity to see what they looked like. They were troughs, open at the top, about twelve feet long, twelve inches wide, and a foot deep. Each trough composed a section, and the several sections completed the sluice. The bottom board of each section was covered with coarse burlap to aid in retaining the gold, and across it were nailed a series of cleats, or riffles. These were protected from the larger

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plates treated with mercury to catch the finer gold. When they had thoroughly examined the "boxes," Dick began to explain the sluicing method.

But at that instant the prospectors opened the water-gates, and the boys saw the whole operation carried on before their eyes. With a hissing roar the released water tore down the side of the ravine, and the earth, already loosened, crumbled and fell away before it. It tumbled to the bottom of the ravine and was washed through the sluices. A man stood over the first box with a sluice-fork to turn aside the large rocks.

"As the gold is heavier than the earth, it drops through the slats and collects on the burlap behind the riffles. When they make a 'clean-up' they shut off the water, take out the slats, and collect the accumulation from the bottom. Then the gold is extracted by panning," Dick explained.

On their way back to the tent they came across two men who were sinking a shaft to bed-rock. They had dug and timbered a

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into buckets, and his "pardner" drew them to the top. There the earth was dumped into a pile to be panned at leisure. The boys stood in the bucket and were lowered into the shaft. It was like being at the bottom of a well; but the air was dank and stuffy, and they were glad to regain the surface.

"Gold-hunting isn't the picnic some people think it is," declared George.

"It's about the hardest job and the smallest pay that a man can engage in," said Dick.

After dinner the whole camp assembled to witness the drilling contest. A large block of stone had been cleared for the purpose, and Dick mounted it and read the rules. The men were allowed an hour in which to sink their drills into the rock. The team that sank its steel farthest in that time would be declared the winner. One man was to hold the drill while the other did the striking. They could relieve each other as often as they chose. Two time-keepers were selected, and when they had taken their places beside Dick

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were cheered enthusiastically. They lost little time in preliminaries, and within five minutes the contest had commenced.

"Lucky" sat on a block of wood and began the hole with a small hand-drill, and six feet away Charley Smith made the same start for his team. Their friends cheered them on, and it was not long before they were ready for the longer drills. Then "Lucky" held the steel and Jeff swung the sledge, and Smith, too, allowed his "pardner" to do the pounding. The men with the sledges put all their strength into their blows, and the drills jumped violently. Each time the men changed positions the crowd cheered, and when they stopped to clean the holes they were warned that they were losing valuable time.

"Jeff is too old for such work," laughed a man in the crowd.

"Some things improve with age, and I'm one of them," replied Jeff.

Half the hour had passed, and there was no appreciable difference in the length of the two drills. The men were working like well-

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ened his blows, Smith easily kept up with him. The boys began to fear for their favorites. But at the end of fifteen minutes, as Jeff relieved his "pardner," they thought they saw a gain.

"They're ahead," declared Ed, excitedly.

"Go it, Jeff!" cried George.

"Last ten minutes," warned the time-keepers.

"Lucky" had just cleaned the hole, and at the announcement he motioned for Jeff to sit down, and picked up the sledge. Smith rose to finish it with him. The spectators cheered wildly as the two veterans fought it out. The pace was an exhausting one, but neither man dared slacken it. The boys could not tell whether "Lucky" was ahead, or whether they only imagined it.

"Last five minutes; go to it, boys!" cried the time-keepers.

"Lucky" and Smith were working like demons. They gave no heed to the shouts of the onlookers, for they dared not divert

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XX

A CAVE-IN

LATE the following day they entered a mining town. The boys looked about with interest as they rode slowly along the main street, for it was different from anything they had seen. Everything about it was crude and primitive, and still they found it attractive and picturesque.

The "street" was a lane between a row of low log cabins and more flimsy combinations of boards and canvas. On the outskirts, back from the main thoroughfare, were weather-beaten tents, erected by new-comers who had not had time to build more permanent abodes.

A six-horse freight outfit rumbled down the street ahead of them. Dick said it was one of several which connected the town with the outside world.

building, whose weather-worn sign proclaimed it a hotel. A corpulent individual with a shiny, bald head and a round, jovial face beamed on them from the doorway.

"Scalp me, if it's not Dick Welles!" he cried.

From the appearance of his crown the boys thought he was safe in risking the alternative.

"Hello, Cap!" said Dick, as he dismounted to shake hands. "You're looking as healthy as ever."

"Yes, I'm eatin' my three meals a day without coaxin'."

"Boys, I wish you to meet Captain Brown; Cap, these are two young friends of mine from the East — Ed Williams and George Rand. I'm showing them some of our country."

"Well, boys, you've picked the right man for the job," laughed Brown, as he slapped Dick on the back.

"Can you put us up for a day or two?"

"I'll put you up for the rest of your life if you'll stay," declared the proprietor. "Take your horses around to the barn; I'll get the

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"Isn't he odd?" laughed George as they started for the barn.

"Old Cap Brown is quite a character," said Dick. "He's made enough money to retire long ago, but he stays in business for the fun he gets out of it."

"Has he been a miner?" inquired Ed.

"No, he's been a business man; I reckon he's what you might call a frontier financier. He owns stock in every mine within twenty miles of here."

By the time they had unpacked the horses the Captain appeared.

"Tote your stuff over here," he invited, opening the door of a small log building at the end of the barn.

"How is business?" inquired Dick, as they carried their personal belongings toward the primitive hostelry.

"Chock-a-block," declared the Captain. "I tell you, this here town is becomin' as prominent as a wart on a pretty girl's nose."

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which was a rusty tin basin, and pointed to a filled water-pail on the floor.

"There's the makin's of a wash," said Brown. "But hold on; I'll fetch out a clean towel." And he pulled the soiled one from the roller and took a new one from the bottom drawer of a dusty desk.

They heard the shuffle of feet and the moving of chairs in an adjoining room. Then several toil-grimed men formed in line behind them for a chance at the wash-basin.

"The boys are comin' in to supper; I'll go and set places for you fellows. When you're ready come through this door," said the proprietor, as he left them.

The dining-room reminded the boys of one they had seen in a lumber camp in Maine. There was the same style long table, flanked by similar rows of jolly, broad-shouldered men. They noticed that these men were not as brown as the lumber-jacks, and they realized it was because they spent so much of their time under ground.

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learned that a dip is the drop of the vein at a sharp angle to its original course; that a drift is an underground gallery or tunnel in a mine; that a fault is a break or shift in the vein or rock; and that an outcrop is the appearance of the ore at the surface of the ground.

"Well, let's take chairs and go outside where we can see all that's goin' on," proposed the Captain, as they rose from the table.

For several hours he interested them with his quaint descriptions of early frontier life. The board walk before the hotel was the natural rendezvous of the little community, and by the time the Captain had "spun" his last yarn he was the center of an interested group of admirers. Among them was "Old Buckskin" Miller, one of the old-time stage-drivers. At seventy-six years of age he was still in the service, and every day in the year he made the sixty-five-mile trip between the mining town and the settlement.

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about that little mix-up on Middle Fork, when you finished the fight with a skinful of Nez Percé arrows. Scalp me, if he didn't look like a porcupine when we lifted him from the seat."

But, like most men who have had real adventures, the old stage-driver was loath to talk about them. When he was finally prevailed upon to tell the story, he told it so simply and so modestly that his own heroic conduct seemed but a minor detail of the thrilling adventure. With his horses killed in the traces, and all but two of his passengers dead or wounded, he held off a horde of war-crazed Nez Percé Indians until a rescue party came to his assistance.

"But those days are gone, so what's the use of talkin' about them," laughed the old frontiersman as he finished his story.

Soon afterward the little group broke up, and Dick and the boys followed the Captain up a narrow flight of creaky stairs to the room reserved for them. They found it ex-

tion covered with burlap separated the room from the adjoining one.

"I reckon you'll be comfortable here till daylight. Snore louder than the fellow next door, and you'll win out," advised the proprietor.

But the "other fellow" got in his work first, and for an hour they were kept awake by a weird and doleful serenade from the sleeper next door.

"It looks like he's beaten us to it," laughed Dick.

"He certainly is a past-master in the art," declared Ed.

Then, to use Dick's words, the slumberer "blew off his steam," and they were not further annoyed. The boys slept until the breakfast-bell awakened them. Dick had already risen, and they heard him talking with some one down-stairs.

"Scalp me, if I don't take the day off and show you fellows around," said the Captain,

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as his foot touched the stirrup they saw that he was thoroughly at home in the saddle. Laughing at their unconcealed astonishment, he led them through the town at a brisk canter.

"He hasn't forgotten how to ride," said Ed.

"When he was younger and more slender he was one of the best bronco-busters in this part of the country," Dick told them.

They came to the end of the town, and followed a steep, winding trail up the side of the nearest mountain. It led to a great black tunnel into the mountain-side, and as they approached it a man appeared at the entrance and waved his hand.

"This is the Honey Bee mine," explained the Captain. "They call it that because it's always workin'."

They dismounted and tied the horses. Then the miner invited them into the mine. He went to a little tool-house and returned with a large miner's candle for each of them.

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drift, and found two men at work cutting out the ore. They watched them until a sudden dizziness warned them that it was time to return to the outside air.

"How do they stand it?" inquired Ed. "My head began to whirl like a top."

"It's all a matter of getting used to it," Dick assured him.

"Well, you've seen the way the small independent operators work their mines; now we'll go where things are run on a larger scale. We'll go back to the base of the mountain and up through the gap to the Blue Daisy, the largest paying mine in this part of the country," said the Captain.

When they reached it they found a different-looking outfit. There were several tunnels, each one drilled to "tap" the ore-bed at a different level. And in place of the tiny tool-house there was a collection of large buildings, from which sounded the rattle and crash of machinery. A narrow-gauge track extended into the mine, and the ore was

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or crushers. These were provided with copper plates containing quicksilver. After passing through a screen, the rock was pulverized, and the gold was caught on the plates. Then the mass was swept over jarring or moving concentrating-tables, which sorted the light and the heavy materials and saved the fine gold. The stamp-mill was operated by water-power generated higher up on the mountain. The boys spent an hour or more watching the interesting operation.

"Well, let's go and see where all this wealth comes from," proposed the Captain.

They put on miners' caps, with small lamps fastened to them, and entered a car and were drawn into the mine. The superintendent went with them, and their tour of inspection was an interesting one. The mine was lighted and ventilated by electricity; large fans drove out the foul air and sucked in a fresh supply. Powerful drills mounted on columns cut the rock in all directions. Work was progressing on several different

which had not seen daylight for months. Ed and George were given an opportunity to try one of the drills, and they thoroughly enjoyed the experience. When they left the mine the superintendent gave them specimens of ore in which the gold was visible to the naked eye.

The boys were well satisfied with their morning's work, and when the Captain declared it time to turn toward home they were quite willing to follow him.

"Scalp me, if I don't eat a man-size meal," he laughed, as they saw smoke rising from the culinary department of the hotel.

But as they cantered up the main street all thoughts of food were driven from their minds. They found the town in a state of excitement. A man ran toward them with a pick and a shovel. Behind him came others.

"The Silver Tip has caved in, and Jim Morrison is buried," cried the first man as he passed.

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The Captain wheeled his horse and gal-

veloped in a small way by the unfortunate victim and his "pardner," "Bud" Hawkes.

The mine was on the outskirts of the town, and they were not long in reaching it. They found a group of sober-faced men standing solemnly about a slide of earth and timbers. The top and sides of a poorly constructed tunnel had given way and buried the unlucky miner. A keen-eyed young chap was probing into the wreckage with a long steel bar, and the others were anxiously awaiting the result of his investigations. The Captain told the boys he was the chief engineer of the large company whose mine they had visited a few hours before.

"Why don't they do something?" inquired Ed, impatiently.

"They can't till they know where to dig. If they start in the wrong place they're likely to tumble the whole heap on top of him," explained Dick.

"But by the time he decides where to dig the entombed man may be dead," said George.

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the earth hasn't crushed him," said the Captain. "But he may have smothered for want of air."

The engineer finally found what he was searching for: a section of the tunnel had held, and there was the possibility that Morrison was alive at that point. He gave the men their instructions, and they began to dig. Ed and George worked with the others, and the thought that they were racing against death spurred them on; in their minds they pictured the agony of the imprisoned miner. If he were alive they realized that each second must seem like an eternity to him. They continued to work throughout the balance of the day. Toward twilight the Captain appeared with a bountiful supply of food and coffee.

"You'll do better work if you eat something," he told them.

The men were relieved by new volunteers from the Blue Daisy, who came down at the end of their "shift." The boys were ravenously hungry, for they had eaten nothing since breakfast. But while they were en-

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XXI

A MOUNTAIN DUEL

EARLY the next morning they bade the Captain good-by and resumed their journey. At the end of two hours they turned from the cañon to cross a "dip" in the giant range at their right. They toiled up to a snow-filled pass, and then the real work began.

Vixen showed an inclination to balk at the climb, and it was only after long and forceful persuasion that she finally struggled up the incline of crusted snow. Dick led the way with Buck, and the three pack-horses followed in his trail; the boys, as usual, closed the rear. The glare was blinding, and Dick gave each of the boys a pair of blue glasses

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stopped to rest. While they were looking toward the summit of the great range, which rose abruptly on each side of the narrow defile, they saw a fox running nimbly across the snow-fields. They were amused when it lost its footing at a particularly steep place and rolled some distance before it recovered itself.

"What do you suppose it can be after away up here in such bleak surroundings?" asked George.

"Pikas, I reckon," said Dick.

"What are pikas?"

"Pikas are little brown animals that look like a cross between a rabbit and a rat. They have a rabbit-like head and a rat-like body, except that they have no tail to speak of.[1] Listen; there's one now," said Dick.

The boys heard what sounded like a shrill whistle, which seemed to come from a crevice

[1] Afterward the boys found the pika more formally described in a book as "a small Alpine lagomyid rodent." Then they looked up lagomyidæ and found them defined as "a family of *duplicidentate* rodents with twenty-six or twenty-two teeth,

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among the boulders. They looked through the binoculars, but were unable to discover the animal that made the noise.

"What do they find to keep them alive in such an inhospitable abode?" inquired Ed.

"They live upon the few grasses and plants that grow up here. And they're provident, too, for they pile them into tiny haystacks among the rocks, and when their little crop is dry they hoard it away for the winter," explained Dick.

"But even in their isolated retreat they are preyed upon and destroyed," said Ed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, they have many enemies — eagles, hawks, foxes, and even mountain-lions snap them up whenever they get the chance. But they're keen-eyed and alert, and I reckon they'll survive long after most of the others have been exterminated."

After lunch they again entered the timber

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"What's the matter with stopping right here?" he asked.

His suggestion exactly suited the boys, for the place looked interesting. It seemed like the natural rendezvous for all the animals of the region. The splendid pasturage should entice elk and deer, and they in turn would draw the carnivorous beasts from the mountains. These hopes were strengthened when the boys found several well-worn game-trails beside the stream. At one place they saw the unmistakable prints of a bear, and instantly their enthusiasm was aroused.

"George, I believe this is a natural game-preserve," Ed declared.

"There are enough signs to make one think so," replied George.

After they had helped Dick they tried the stream for trout. As in most of the streams they had fished, they found them abundant, and by supper-time their creels were well filled.

"Dick, your Western country surely is a land of milk and honey," laughed Ed.

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"I'm afraid it's like a pantry whose key

Some of the best things are gone from the shelves; but we've found the key, and now we're a bit more careful of what's left."

After supper they put out the fire and sat near the tent to watch for game. Three deer entered the valley farther up the stream. They caught sight of the horses and the tent, and stopped with their heads raised and their long ears pointed forward. Dick and the boys remained motionless, but the wary creatures were suspicious, and, alarmed at what they saw, they turned and cantered gracefully to the mountains.

Just before dark a small band of elk trotted to the brook for their evening drink. When they had slaked their thirst they began to feed. But a bull suddenly looked toward the intruders, and a moment later the band was in flight.

"They are suspicious of everything, aren't they?" said George.

"That's what saves them," replied Dick.

As they were about to enter the tent they

"It's a lynx," said George.

"That's right," Dick assured him.

They waited to hear it again, but it did not repeat the cry, and they went into the tent.

The following day they climbed to the top of the second range of mountains. Their route was through a tantalizing jumble of down timber, and they had much lifting and chopping to do before they reached the summit.

"That's what I call work," said Ed as they sat down to rest.

The descent of the opposite slope was equally hard, for again they were compelled to make their own trail. But the boys were not lazy, and they enjoyed the experience, for they realized that they were getting a bit of real pioneering.

That afternoon they made camp in a cañon. The stream which flowed through it was shallow and narrow, and, as there were no fish in it, the boys turned from it in disgust. While Dick was busy preparing sup-

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at them from a rock-slide, and, determined to have a look at this mysterious little creature, they began to climb toward the sound.

"What are they?" asked George as he stopped Ed and pointed toward the opposite wall of the cañon.

High up near the top, on a narrow shelf of rock, were two white animals. They were facing each other, a few yards apart, and at first sight the boys mistook them for mountain-sheep. Then Ed looked through the glasses and discovered the mistake. These beasts were hump-shouldered, and had low-set heads, short necks, straight black horns, and a peculiar beard-like growth of hair on the lower jaw. They looked stupid and clumsy.

"By ginger, they're mountain-goats!" cried Ed as he passed the binoculars to George.

"As sure as you're born," agreed George.

The cañon wall was high and precipitous, and any attempt to reach them would have been futile. The goats seemed to realize

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"I'm afraid the first rush will end the battle."

Their positions made it evident that the goats, having come from opposite directions, had met "head-on" at the narrowest place in the ribbon-like trail. Each seemed determined to hold its ground, and as there was not room enough to pass, a combat was inevitable. Interested by the possibilities of such an encounter, the boys sat down to watch.

For several minutes the goats remained motionless. Then one stamped its foot and shook its head. It was evidently a challenge, for the other instantly went through the same manœuvers. Having proclaimed its aggressiveness, there was nothing for the first goat to do but advance. It went forward cautiously, and its opponent lowered its nose to the trail and presented the sharp points of its dagger-like horns. Such a front seemed impregnable, and the challenger halted.

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The goats again went through their threatening preliminaries. Then one of them rushed forward, and the real battle began. They butted and pushed, and tried to force each other from the narrow foothold. The animals were well matched in size and strength, and the encounter was a savage one. Each moment the boys expected to see one or both of the enraged combatants topple into space. But in spite of their exertions they remained on the ledge. They fought entirely with their heads, and it seemed as if the sharp horns must pierce the skull. Sometimes the force of the impact threw the fighters to their haunches, and then the boys expected to see them fall; but they invariably regained their feet without slipping from the narrow shelf.

"They're not as clumsy as they look," said George.

"I should say not," replied Ed. "How they ever stay up there is a mystery to me."

"They don't appear to do much damage to each other, either."

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"No, they're unable to do more than

they parried the vicious thrusts with a grace and agility that amazed the boys. More than once they came to a deadlock, and for several seconds they strove against each other, head to head.

"If they push each other from the ledge we'll have goat meat for breakfast," laughed Ed.

"We wouldn't dare touch them; they're protected by law," George reminded him.

"Yes, I know; but if they killed themselves we're not breaking any laws by taking the meat."

"It might be hard to convince a game-warden that we had not killed them."

"You're right, old man; I guess we had better leave them alone."

"But they've not fallen yet," laughed George.

Then the tide of battle turned, and one of the goats began to give way. It backed slowly along the narrow shelf, but when its antagonist endeavored to push it from the trail

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"It can't very well retreat any other way. It hasn't enough room to turn, and if it tries to hurry it will fall from the ledge."

The victorious goat was determined to shove the other to its doom. Flushed with success, each moment it became more aggressive. It rushed wildly at its retreating foe, and seemed utterly regardless of its own safety. It appeared to have gone mad from rage, and the other took advantage of its carelessness and turned defeat into victory. Awaiting a favorable opportunity, the retreating goat threw the other to its knees, and, before it could recover, rushed forward and toppled it from the ledge.

The boys felt sick as they watched the overconfident warrior fall to its doom. It was a drop of several hundred feet to the bed of the cañon, and the goat turned twice in the air and then fell upon the rocks. The boys shuddered as they heard the thud. A little cloud of dust rose from the spot, and as it drifted away they saw the shaggy white body lying inert among the boulders. They looked

"I'm sorry it ended that way," replied Ed.

"So am I; but it only goes to show that it doesn't always pay to make too much of a victory."

They hurried down the rock-slide and crossed the cañon. When they reached the goat it was dead. Its head was turned beneath it, and they saw that its neck had been broken by the fall. As they were examining the carcass Dick appeared.

"I've shouted myself hoarse, and when you didn't answer I thought you might have got into trouble," he said.

"See what we have here," said Ed.

"I saw him tumble from the ledge," replied Dick.

"May we take the skin and horns?" inquired George.

"And try some of the meat?" proposed Ed.

"Not unless you're willing to risk the chance of going to jail. You see, we might come across a game-warden any time, and if

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XXII

THE HOME TRAIL

THREE days later they arrived at Dick's cabin. The little log house was as they had left it. Dick found the key over the door, and they went inside. There was nothing to show that the room had been entered during their absence.

"I reckon the bunks need new mattresses," laughed Dick as he crumpled the dry balsam between his fingers.

"We'll cut a fresh supply," said Ed.

While Dick unpacked the horses and carried in the duffle the boys went for boughs. Then they noticed the change. The fact that summer ages quickly in the high places was made evident to them. The earlier flowers had disappeared, seed-pods or dried

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"Yes; and our vacation, too."

At the end of an hour they returned to the cabin with back-loads of balsam boughs. They cut them into suitable lengths and arranged them in the bunks. Then Dick announced supper.

"Dick, we've just realized that our time is almost up," said Ed as they sat about the table.

"Pshaw! You might as well stay awhile longer and have some hunting," proposed Dick. "In about three weeks the elk will begin to bugle, and then these mountains will ring with the finest kind of music. I've engaged to guide two hunting-parties, and if you'll stay over I'll take you along as my assistants on both trips."

"We should like nothing better; but we've had a long playtime, and now we'll have to settle down to work," George reminded him.

"Well, I reckon that's the proper way to look at it," said Dick.

After supper they went outside. The nights were growing cool, and the air suggested

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but I call it downright unsociable. Now a camp-fire is plumb entertaining company. It sings and talks and chuckles as long as you're willing to sit and listen. There's something about it that makes you feel at home."

They sat in the ruddy glow from the flames and watched the night close about them. The western sky paled, and the adjacent mountain-peaks melted into the gathering gloom. A star twinkled overhead; then they saw another, farther away, and suddenly the heavens were illuminated. A thrush sang its evening song at the border of the little "park." Vixen must have raised her head to listen, for they heard the sleepy tinkle of her bell. Then up from the cañon rose the dismal wail of a coyote. The fire crackled cheerily, and the boys understood Dick's affection for it. They, too, had learned to regard it as the woodsman's best friend.

"Suppose we go in and try the new 'mattresses,'" proposed Dick, as the flames subsided into a bed of glowing embers.

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way home they saw a large lynx. It sat in the middle of the trail and regarded them curiously. Ed brought the camera into position, and George reached for his revolver; but before either could act the lynx vanished into the undergrowth.

"Never mind, his fur isn't prime yet, anyway," said George, as he shoved the weapon into its holster.

"It wouldn't have been noticeable in the picture," laughed Ed.

That night they were visited by a pack-rat, and the boys had a lively time before they finally killed it. They were in bed when they first heard it, and they rose and lighted the lamp. Then they chased the rat about the room, and each time it showed itself they hurled a stick of firewood in its direction. Some of them went wide of the mark, and one hit Ed on his big toe, and another "barked" George's shin.

"Say, if that rat hadn't run plumb into

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"And my toe is filled with pain," said Ed.

A week later they set out for civilization. The sun was just rising as Dick closed the door of the cabin and climbed into the saddle. For several moments the boys made no move to start. They looked about them at the great peaks, the splendid forest, the cozy little cabin, and then they rode slowly away down the trail. Dick, too, was silent, and they wondered if it was because they were leaving.

On the way down the mountain they "jumped" two deer, and the boys noticed the "velvet" hanging in long strips from the buck's antlers. It gave him an odd appearance, and they laughed about it to Dick.

"They'll soon be clean and ready for fighting," he said.

Early in the afternoon they came upon one of their old camp-sites, and they stopped for a last look at old Cut-off. That night they camped on the plain.

Late the following day they rode into the little frontier town. They went first to the post-office and received two large bundles

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"Well, I'm sure glad to see you back safe and sound," said the proprietor, as they entered. "If you hadn't showed up pretty soon I'd have begun to think about offerin' a collection of dude clothes at auction," he added, as he winked at Dick.

"I reckon they'll need them in a day or two," said Dick. "But remember that 'clothes don't make the man,' and any one who takes these fellows for dudes is due to be plumb surprised."

After supper Dick went out to purchase a new stock of supplies, and the boys went with him. He said he expected to "pull out for home" as soon as they left. They saw a number of cowboys in town, and the boys met several who reminded them of their friends at the Lazy Y. When Dick had completed his purchases they returned to the hotel. It was then that the boys found an opportunity to express their appreciation of his many kindnesses.

"Dick, you've given us the time of our

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"And you've put us in better condition than all the trainers in the country could," declared George. "I'm ready to play football at a moment's notice."

"Then I reckon I've carried out your dad's instructions," said Dick. "And I'll add that I've never had two better campmates."

The boys were delighted with the compliment.

In the morning Dick accompanied them to the train. It "made up" at the station, for the railroad ended at the town.

"Well, take care of yourselves, boys, and remember that there's a little cabin up near old Cut-off where you'll always be welcome," were Dick's parting words, as the train moved from the station carrying them from the mountain trails back to the land of towns and books.

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